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Pre-primary children's progress and the school development plan

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**PRE-PRIMARY CHILDREN'S PROGRESS AND THE SCHOOL
DEVELOPMENT PLAN.**

Elizabeth. A. Moulin B.Ed.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of

Master of Education

at the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University

Date of Submission: 24. 8. 97

ABSTRACT

In recent years several policy changes have occurred in Western Australia regarding the provision of pre-compulsory education, particularly for children turning five. These changes have led to education of such children centred largely in full-time, on-site classes rather than in sessional, independent community centres, resulting in pre-primary education becoming mainstream school business. As such it is incorporated in the administrative, managerial and educational policies of the school including school development planning. The school development plan (SDP), a major tool of accountability within the school, provides a planning framework in selected priority areas in which methods of assessment and evaluation of children's progress are an important tool in demonstrating that accountability. There is a concern among some pre-primary teachers and Early Childhood Education specialists that these changes may lead to a trend towards practices more indicative of upper primary school levels, known as a 'push down' effect, on pre-primary classes. There is also a concern that an emphasis on assessment and evaluation for accountability purposes may lead to a decline in the use of assessment data in classroom planning.

This qualitative study examined how and why teachers in selected Perth metropolitan pre-primary classes gathered and recorded information on children's progress, and how these choices related to the teacher's responsibility as articulated in the school development plan. The study also identified how that information was used both at class and school levels.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature.

Date 25.11.97

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The field of early childhood generally applies to children from birth to eight years of age. In Western Australia this encompasses all forms of education and care prior to compulsory schooling plus the first two years of compulsory schooling. However, the primary focus of study is education pertaining to children turning five in the pre-school or pre-primary year of pre-compulsory education. Traditionally early childhood teachers working at the pre-school or pre-primary level are concerned with the development of children, focusing on the concept of the whole child as a dynamic, developing individual. Programs are normally planned around a developmental framework, incorporating specific domains of development such as physical, social/emotional, cognitive/intellectual, and aesthetic. Similarly early childhood teachers have gathered, recorded and interpreted information and reported for the evaluation of children's progress in terms of development rather than in terms of achievement in subject areas (EDWA, 1995b). Assessment and evaluation have always been an integral part of early childhood education. Teachers observe children and gather and record information based on that observation. They reflect on this and plan according to observed behaviour and need.

These approaches were largely unchallenged in Western Australia until the mid-1970s. Indeed, until that time pre-school children in Western Australia (ie. those turning five in the current school year) were educated in Community pre-school centres under the auspices of The Western Australian Pre-school Board where early childhood traditions were unchallenged. In the second half of the 1970's, however, a series of government changes took place including:

- i. The introduction of pre-primary classes into some Western Australian primary schools.
- ii. The abolition of the Western Australian Pre-school Board and the consolidation of all education of children turning five in the current year under the auspices of the Education Department of Western Australia.
- iii. The introduction of negotiations between government officials and community pre-school parents for pre-school centres to become pre-primary classes attached to the local primary school.

By 1997 the majority of children turning five attend pre-primary classes, many of which offer full time education four, or in some cases, five days a week. By 1998 sufficient full-time pre-primary places are proposed for every child turning five in that year to have access to a full-time place four days per week. By the year 2000 it is envisaged that full-time pre-primary will mean five full-time days per week, for children turning five and that sessional part-time places will also be offered on school premises for children turning four. Thus education of children turning five has clearly become mainstream primary school business.

1.2 The Significance of the School Development Plan

Whilst the changes from pre-school to pre-primary education may not in themselves have led to significant changes in the education of pre-primary children, the policy changes which have occurred in the Education Department in recent years and the changes in how society as a whole views education have fundamentally challenged early childhood traditions. One of the most significant changes in Western Australia occurred in 1990 with the introduction of a collaborative planning process in which each school staff was required to formulate a school development plan (SDP), complete

with a mission statement, student outcome statements and a management information system (MIS). This plan was to serve as a statement of school direction and process. Each school would be accountable for its activity in relation to the Plan. "The Department of Education's policy is quite clear. Accountability is where schools take responsibility for their own performance and what they do to improve the schools performance." (Schools Development Group 1991.4)

The MIS is the area of school development planning which directly relates to school accountability. The MIS system sets an agreed process whereby data are collected to contribute to an annual plan of action to improve various chosen aspects of the school, termed priority areas. In this study a school development plan is therefore construed as the accountability policy guiding the actions of classroom teachers. It is also argued that because of the devolution of authority from state level to school level the SDP becomes policy once it is accepted by the staff. The process of devolution is shown in figure 1.

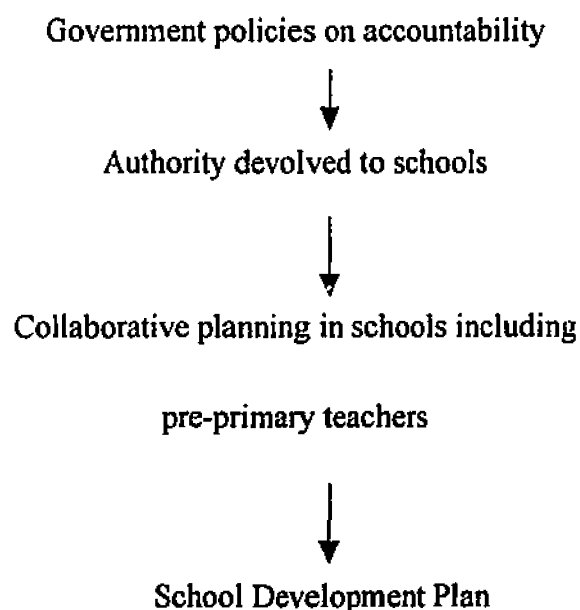


Figure 1 Process of devolution

Thus choices teachers make in regard to the priority areas of their curriculum are made within the confines of the SDP. An SDP and its underlying accountability framework may bring together teachers who have different philosophical backgrounds and training and locate them within a single planning process. Philosophies which uphold a subject oriented curriculum and assessment methods which involve various testing devices may exist alongside philosophies which uphold a developmental approach with child study methods of assessment. As a consequence early childhood teachers, who normally espouse the latter and who form a minority of staff may be in a dilemma in collaborative planning situations. The researcher, therefore, considered it significant to examine the way early childhood teachers work in the context of the relevant SDP.

1.3 The Significance of Examining Evaluation and Assessment in the Context of the School Development Plan

In recent years much emphasis in education has been placed on evaluation and assessment, particularly in regard to student performance. This corresponds with a greater emphasis on accountability. An SDP indicates the type of data to be gathered for each of the identified student outcomes being targeted in each priority area and specifies methods to be used. From the gathered data the school decision-making group analyses its performance in relation to the targeted outcomes and makes further decisions for school development. (School Development Group 1991). Since the majority of the data arises from student performance, it seems that many of the dilemmas facing pre-primary teachers lie in the field of evaluation and assessment. An Education Department source stated:

Traditionally, early childhood teachers have observed and evaluated student progress in relation to domains of development rather than curriculum areas. The integration of these developmental perspectives with the whole school frameworks for curriculum monitoring and reporting requires problem solving but is essential in ensuring that the needs of the early childhood program are met in strategic planning at the school and system level (EDWA draft.1995b. p.51.).

Certain questions arise in the light of this accountability process, particularly those linked to the SDP, such as: "Can traditional methods of evaluating young children's progress still be used?", "Will there be changes or additions to those methods such as specified check lists and/or standardized tests and will such changes and additions lead to an altered approach to teaching in the early years?"

It was considered significant, therefore, to examine the methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress used by pre-primary teachers, and the use of the gathered information in the context of the school development plan.

1.4 Clarification of Terms used Within the Study

There are certain terms used in this research study which may convey different meanings to different people. Although some of these are discussed at length in the literature review, the following definitions clarify the writer's use of these terms:

Evaluation

Evaluation is a decision-making process that involves staff, management, and families through the following steps:

Deciding why evaluation is taking place

Deciding what to evaluate

Deciding upon appropriate techniques, time frame and staff, management and family role

Gathering relevant information

Interpreting and sharing the information

Using the information and interpreting in future action and planning.

(Arthur et al, 1993. p. 192)

Assessment

Assessment is part of the evaluation process, "including the gathering of data, interpretation and recording." (Griffin, 1991.p 5)

When referring to assessment/evaluation processes in general terms, the writer has used the term assessment.

Gathering of Data

This refers to the methods which teachers may use to collect information on children's progress in pre-primary classes. Such methods might include observation, portfolios of children's work, time sampling, audio-visual recordings, standardized testing.

Recording of Information

The writer acknowledges that in some instances it is difficult to differentiate between methods of gathering data on children's progress and methods of recording that information, namely the written down record or descriptions of the gathered data. Such methods might include diaries or daily logs, anecdotal records, comments in portfolios, activity records, checklists/rating scales, sociograms, test results and developmental continua.

Interpretation of Data and decision-making.

This is the part of evaluation dealing with how the teacher interprets the data. Decision-making refers to the process of planning based on gathered information on children's progress both at class and school levels.

Reporting

Refers to the various modes of communication regarding student progress which take place between the teacher and other groups within the school, eg teachers to

parents, teachers to the principal, teachers to the school-decision making-group, teachers to the next teacher to take the students, and principal to the District Office or to the superintendent.

Framework based on Developmental Domains

Developmental domains refer to areas of development, as opposed to subject areas. "Early childhood curriculum is integrated, providing experiences focused on the whole child" (EDWA. 1996. p1). The developmental domains form a framework on which to build such a curriculum, including cognitive, physical, social, emotional and aesthetic areas of development. In assessment processes "the teacher collects precise and detailed information about children's development in all domains" (EDWA 1996. p.8).

Developmental Continua

Children develop at different rates. Key indicators of development are selected which are placed on a continuum of development. These indicators are then grouped together into 'phases'. When a child has exhibited all the key indicators in a given phase then he/she is said to be within the phase.

Subject-based framework

The curriculum is based on subjects rather than developmental areas. The eight learning areas of the National Curriculum Framework and the Western Australian Student Outcome Statements Documents are based on this type of framework.

Student Outcome Statements (SOS)

Outcome Statements were designed to describe the outcomes which students could be expected to achieve as they progressed through schooling. "The Student Outcome Statements are intended to establish concisely and effectively, a curriculum framework

for the work of Government schools in Western Australia” (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994, p.5). The Outcome Statements (as issued by the Education Department of Western Australia) were grouped on the basis of eight ‘learning areas’ (subject areas), comprising the Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Languages other than English,, Mathematics, Science, Studies of Society and Environment and Technology and Enterprise (EDWA 1994, p.10)

First Steps

In the current study the term First Steps (program) refers to a literacy program first issued by the Education Department of Western Australia and now published by Addison Wesley Longman (1995/96). It presents the areas of literacy in a developmental manner, in which children may be assessed using informal methods and then placed on a developmental continuum. Ideally, the program is used throughout the school, each child moving along the continuum at his/her own rate.

Gender use

Participants in the study are referred to in the feminine i.e. ‘she’ or ‘her’. This is because all participants were women.

1.5 Research Questions

The following questions formed the basis for this research study.

1. What are the methods of gathering and recording information for evaluation of children's progress in selected pre-primary classes?
2. What led the teacher to select the methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress?
3. How is the gathered information used?
4. How do the selected methods of gathering information on children's progress and the use of the gathered information relate to the requirements of the given School Development Plan?

1.6 Presentation of the Study

Chapter 2 gives a review of literature in which the context of early childhood education is considered. The concepts of curriculum and assessment and evaluation in early childhood form the major part of this review. The discussion is then expanded to include the pressures exerted on the early childhood curriculum particularly in the Western Australian context. In addition, literature is reviewed on the methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress in early childhood education, and the use of that information including for reporting and accountability. In conclusion, concerns of early childhood educators are examined focusing on the time spent in assessment-related tasks.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodology adopted, incorporating the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework used, choices made in regard to aspects of the research process and the method of data collection processes, selection of case studies, and

research interviews. The pilot study is described and ethics considerations are outlined.

Chapter 4 gives the results of both the pilot study and the main research. This is organized around the case studies, each of which includes an overview of the class, methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress, reasons for those choices, use of the gathered information and teacher concerns regarding assessment and evaluation. The latter part of Chapter 4 outlines processes and material not used by the teachers along with the concerns expressed by teachers about data gathering, application and reporting.

In chapter 5 the results are analyzed and discussed.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The introduction to this work outlined the background of the study, briefly describing the foundations of early childhood curriculum and the related areas of assessment and evaluation. It also outlined a number of changes within Western Australia between 1970 and 1997 which may have challenged early childhood education perspectives on curriculum, particularly relating to the pre-school/pre-primary year. Consequently, the first four sections of this chapter examine literature on early childhood education curriculum, assessment and evaluation, methods used by early childhood educators to gather and record information on children's progress, and the use of assessment and evaluation in early childhood education. A fifth section further examines the historical perspectives on early childhood curriculum in Western Australia which may have exerted pressure on traditional early childhood perspectives on curriculum, assessment and evaluation, whilst section 2.6 examines literature concerning responses of early childhood educators to change in Western Australia. This theme is extended in section 2.7 in which other developments within the early childhood education field are explored which may also exert pressure on the traditional curriculum. Although the study focuses on early childhood classes in Western Australia, literature is also examined in the wider context relating to early childhood curriculum in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK).

The introduction to this study also explained the significance of the School Development Plan to the current study, noting the reasons for considering assessment and evaluation in the context of the School Development Plan. The Literature Review, therefore, further explores the wider concept of accountability which in part is accomplished through the School Development Plan in Western Australian schools.

Finally, literature is examined on the element of reporting particularly to parents. Although reporting is mentioned in the application of assessment, it is also part of the accountability process, in that schools have been required to formulate a reporting policy. For this reason reporting is examined in greater depth following the section on accountability.

This author was unable to find recent research on assessment practices in relation to school development plans or the management information systems in Western Australia, although some of the research findings by Stamopoulos (1995) were useful in this study. Extensive use was made of papers and reports by the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) concerning curriculum, assessment and evaluation and accountability in that State.

2.1 Early Childhood Education Curriculum

School curriculum is a comprehensive term which applies in its widest sense to all that happens within the school. The definition used in this study views curriculum as “a dynamic process embodying all of the planned learning opportunities offered to learners by the school and the experiences these learners encounter when the curriculum is implemented” (Woods, 1993, p.8). Curriculum is formulated in response to the society and culture which it serves, thus reflecting the traditional assumptions, ideas and values. It is also founded on philosophy and epistemology, learning theory and the views on the nature of man (Woods, p.7) held by the educator, specialist teaching areas and policy-makers of various state education departments, local communities and collaborative planning bodies in individual schools. Woods also noted that curriculum is also a “manipulative strategy in that it

seeks to bring about changes in the learners”(p.7).

Traditionally early childhood education “focused on the needs of children during the early years and on the affective and physical environment required to meet their needs” (Schwartz & Robinson, 1982, p.ix). It was isolated in many respects from the remainder of the education system. McLean (1992) noted that “in the grand scheme of contemporary Australian education early childhood education is a small and largely female field with a strong sense of its unique origins and identity”(p.45). Early childhood education is based on its own philosophy, epistemology, and theories of learning. For this reason early childhood education curriculum has traditionally differed from that of the remainder of the primary school and from other specialist fields. It is viewed as being:

- a. holistic, in which each organism operates as an irreducible whole;
- b. integrated, in which all domains are addressed as inseparable parts of a whole (Mallory & New, 1994, p.110);
- c. closely linked with the field of child development (Mallory & New, 1994.p.66);
- d. interactionist, referring to the dynamics of interchange between children and the environment, and between people in a supportive environment;

McLean (1992) stated:

One of the major features of early childhood education has been the strong sense of shared values about what constitutes worthwhile educational experience for young children and central to the determination of ‘worthwhileness’ has been knowledge of child development. (p.43)

The curriculum is, therefore, designed to match the developmental ability of each

individual child (Elkind, cited in Kagan, 1991, p.3), with the aim of increasing those developmental levels. This concept gave rise to the term 'developmentally appropriate practice' (DAP), a term which became familiar in the early childhood field with the publication by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Bredekamp, 1987). It is a belief promoted by the NAEYC that "high quality developmentally appropriate programs should be made available to all children and their families" (Bredekamp, 1987,p.2).

Curricula designed for early childhood education emphasize the process of learning or how children learn, rather than the content of a program. Subjects such as mathematics and science are, therefore, integrated into the curriculum. Moyles (1992) said "that with core curriculum matters a priority the processes of education are sometimes overlooked and subject-based learning becomes paramount" (p.xi). Barrett (1989) stated that "if curriculum for young children is going to be based on a narrow set of skills to be learned and facts to be stored, then the potential for disaffection beginning in these early years of school will be enormously increased" (p.21). She preferred a curriculum designed to foster "competent, interested learners who can get along with each other. . . . they may not have the same experiences or form of intelligence as each other but they will not be muddled or dispirited whatever their capacity" (p.21). Katz, cited in Kagan (1991), reiterated Barrett's statements when she said "pedagogy for young children should be largely informal in structure, should attend to the childrens' dispositional and emotional development as well as the acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skills" (p.66). Katz also noted the difference between fostering the intellectual development and the teaching of academics, bringing it "into line with what is known about young children's development and learning (p.66).

Traditionally, much of early childhood learning occurs through play, which is a process of learning (Moyles, 1992, p.11).

Play, in fact, is the child's major way of learning. . . Since the activity of the child is play, the most natural and efficient way for the child to acquire competency in any curricular area is through play activity . . . It is through play that the young child recreates the world and comes to understand it (Weininger, 1979, p.5).

Play is not a curriculum in itself but a process which is a vital part of the curriculum for young children. It is a process incorporating all domains as an integral part of early childhood education. Moyles (1992), stressed that whilst educators establish or assess the developmental levels of children through play, it is through play that knowledge of development can be used to increase the levels of development. She emphasized that children need time to practice newly acquired skills in free play experiences with time to make mistakes, time to regress in a non-threatening environment, and periods of directed play in which each child's learning experiences are extended. Moyles pointed out that all this occurs in a carefully arranged play oriented environment of young children. Katz (1992) stated, however, that:

Spontaneous play is not the only alternative to early academic instruction. The data on children's learning suggests that pre-school and kindergarten experiences require an intellectually oriented approach in which children interact in small groups as they work together on projects which helps them to make sense of their own experience (p.3).

In recent years the ground has changed significantly throughout the field of early childhood education, exerting pressures upon the traditional curriculum. Some of these changes and resulting pressures are examined later in this chapter.

2.2 Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education Curriculum

This study examined elements of one aspect of the curriculum in pre-primary classes, that of assessment and evaluation. These are an integral part of any curriculum and must, therefore, be examined in the context of the curriculum. Models of curriculum such as the Tyler, Skilbeck, Nicholls, and Print models (Woods, 1993, pp.14-21) differ in some respects but they all include some form of assessment and evaluation as part of the curriculum process. It was argued that “there must be a match between program objectives and instructional content, between instructional content and assessment instruments, and between program objectives and assessment instruments” (Decker, Decker, 1987, p.218). However, since assessment and evaluation are closely linked the methods used must also be closely linked, matching the curriculum. Assessment practices are thus meant to ‘match’ the curriculum, learning theories and methodology. For example the traditional early childhood curriculum previously discussed should be reflected in the methods of assessment and evaluation and just as there may be conflict between early childhood curriculum and upper primary curriculum so there may be conflict between methods of assessment in these two areas.

Halliwell said:

Child study practices have evolved in the cultural milieu of early childhood programs with their history of close links with families and concerns for health and care along with education for young children as opposed to assessment practices which have arisen from secondary and tertiary levels of education (Halliwell. 1993, p.10).

Child study or informal methods of assessment and evaluation are traditionally used in the field of early childhood education in preference to more formal methods of measurement and testing, with such definitions as “practical application of measurement” or “the actual performance of some type of measurement” (Wiersman

and Jurs, 1976,p.4). Psychometric methods include standardized testing with easily quantifiable results for analysis whereas informal methods are less easily analyzed. This must be noted in relation to the Management Information System (MIS) of Western Australia in which data gathered on children's progress in SDP priority areas must be analyzed and presented in report form.

The significance of the different understandings of assessment and evaluation amongst educators of different school levels must be noted here. Difficulties may arise in formulation and/or interpretation of the school development plan in which assessment methods are often stipulated in relation to the current school priority areas. Early childhood teachers may be expected to carry out assessment which they may believe to be inappropriate for young children, a factor which is examined in this study. There are also differences of opinion concerning the use of the terms assessment and evaluation within the field of early childhood education as well as at other levels. Traditionally, early childhood educators have used the term 'child study' in regard to the process of child observation, interpretation and decision-making within the curriculum. "Child study methods enable complex understandings of how the child functions in the community. They assist the teacher to make decisions which enhance the development of 'key competencies' (Halliwell, 1993). However, although Halliwell argued that the term 'child study' matches early childhood education the term evaluation in place of 'child study' would probably be more acceptable to other levels of schooling. According to Halliwell (1994, p.56) "this is a general term for describing information gathering and interpreting day to day teaching. "

What, then, is evaluation, and does it differ from assessment? Some educators, particularly it seems in the early childhood field, use these terms synonymously while

others make clear demarcation between the two. Wortham (1994, p.213) said "Evaluation of children in pre-school programs consists of informal tools of teacher observation, hands-on tasks, work samples and portfolios", whereas Geneshi (1992) said that assessment refers to "informal ways of observing and documenting development and learning (p.3). Again, Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992) referred to assessment rather than evaluation in their definition.

Assessment is a process of observing, recording and otherwise documenting the work children do, and how they do it, as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect the child (p.23).

On the other hand the Hogben and Wesley (1989) made a distinction between the two terms in saying: "Evaluation is a process to determine whether or not aims and objectives are realized" (p.14). It also said that evaluation "requires information"(p.14); in other words assessment was seen to be part of evaluation and not synonymous with it. Griffin and Nix (1991) understood assessment and evaluation as two distinct entities when they said "Assessment involves collecting data, interpretation and description," whilst "evaluation involves making judgments of worth based on assessment" (p.5). Indeed the Education Department of Western Australia also viewed assessment and evaluation as having two distinct meanings:

Assessment is the process of collecting information about children's learning and development in relation to the learning outcomes articulated in the classroom program. Assessment is a term which refers to informal as well as formal methods of data collection. Evaluation is the process of analyzing and reflecting on assessment data in order to interpret children's performance and identify factors which are facilitating or constraining the effectiveness of the classroom program. (EDWA, 1995b, p.37)

Since this study was carried out in the Western Australia context the term assessment is used to describe methods of collecting and recording information on children's progress whilst evaluation will refer to the use of that information. Despite the differences in

understandings on the terms assessment and evaluation there is general agreement that the processes are an integral part of the curriculum, and that they are important elements of the accountability process.

2.3 Methods used by Early Childhood Educators to Gather and Record

Information on Children's Progress.

Assessment and evaluation consist of a number of processes usually following a similar pattern, illustrated in Figure 2. All assessment requires the gathering of information which then needs to be recorded in some way. The way in which these processes are carried out reflects the philosophies, learning theories and other foundational principles underlying the given curriculum (Woods,1993). Similarly, all evaluation requires analysis, reflection and interpretation, in order to plan and implement further curriculum.

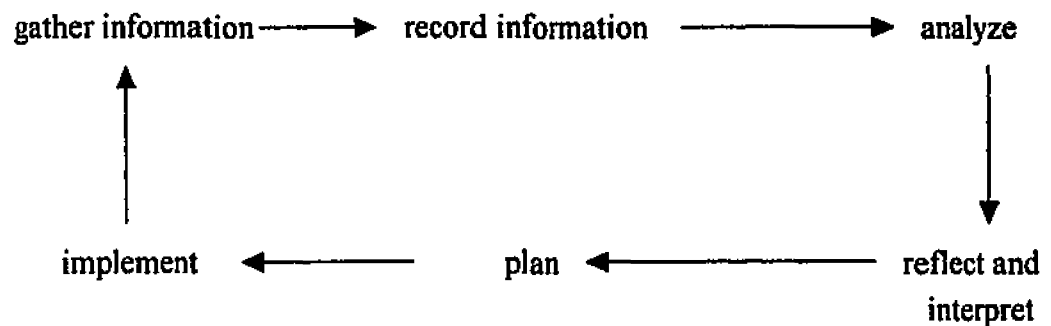


Figure.2 Process of assessment and evaluation (adapted from Veale,A and Piscitelli,B

(1988, p.3)

Hogben and Wesley (1989) stated that "assessment methods must be developmentally appropriate, consistent with the principles of learning, the purposes of

the program and the cultural context” (p.14). This section of the literature review deals with the methods of gathering and recording information on children’s progress commonly used in early childhood classes, but it must also be remembered that emphasis on certain types of methods differs from classroom to classroom. On one end of the continuum are those who predominantly use methods associated with child study philosophies, such as informal observation of children, whilst at the other end are those who extensively use various forms of standardized testing, associated more with psychometric philosophies (Elkind, cited in Kagan. 1991,p.13). Similarly, there are those school development plans which predominantly require informal methods and those which may also prescribe various forms of standardized testing. The most common traditional method of gathering information in early childhood is that of observation, the results of which may then be recorded in various ways. Seefeldt (1990) said that observing is probably the oldest, most frequently used and most rewarding method of assessing children, their growth, development and learning. She added :

To assess young children, who are unable to express themselves fully with words, with any method other than direct observation may not be possible. . Unlike older children and adults, the young are incapable of hiding their feelings, ideas or emotions with socially approved behaviours, so observing them often yields accurate information (p.313).

This viewpoint reflects philosophies associated with traditional early childhood curricula. Bredekamp et al. (1992) noted that observation “can lead to collection of valid, reliable information without intruding on or transforming the daily classroom life and without constraining the children’s behaviour so as to limit their demonstration of competence” (p.50). “Informal, observationally based assessment is the key strategy in developmentally appropriate assessment practice” (EDWA, 1995, b, p.41) The teacher observes in order to understand the unique characteristics that “make each child tick”

(Veale and Piscitelli, 1998, p.2). Although she/he observes the whole time, the teacher usually decides what to observe or who to observe for assessment records. The teacher's observation of children may be enhanced by "observations of other adults who interact with the child in the home or classroom setting adding valuable information to the profile of the child developed by the teacher"(EDWA, 1995, b, p.42). It is further pointed out that the classroom aide plays an important role in both observing and in recording information.

Another method of gathering information on children's progress, which may be seen by some to be a method of recording, is the systematic collection of children's work, containing examples of different work done by the child, photographs of experiences or work done by the child, or audio-tapes of language experiences. This is often referred to as portfolio assessment, which has grown in popularity in recent years (Beaty, 1994). Presentation of children's work collected systematically over a period of time gives direct evidence of progress and can be used with other methods (Decker, 1980). Decker et. al. also noted disadvantages of the method, in that samples may not always be representative of children's work, and some children don't want to part with their work. In addition storage or presentation of such a collection may be expensive both in monetary cost and in time. In response to difficulties in presentation Jayatilaka (1997) recently produced a portfolio assessment package in Western Australia, for collecting student data and work samples. She not only provides a presentation model but also suggests types of work that might be included.

Checklists and various forms of rating lists are commonly used in early childhood assessment, but these may be seen by some to be methods of gathering information and by others to be methods of recording information. Beaty (1994) referred to them as

“tools for observation” (p.9). She said that checklists have the unique ability to give good overviews of child development whilst rating scales give some indication of the degree to which a child has attained a certain trait.

Standardized testing of children is also a method of gathering information on children’s progress. Halliwell (1993) described standardized testing as “measuring performance against a standard” (p.10) and included all forms of standardized testing such as developmental screening, readiness testing and standardized checklists. They incorporate set tests which are designed to measure a specific aspect. Miesels, cited in Mallory (1994), described this measurement as the “systematic assessment of various aspects of children’s knowledge, skill or personality” (p.202). However, there are various types of tests designed for different purposes which may be useful in early childhood education. Meisels argued that it is important to understand the nature of the test, its validity and its reliability, in order to ‘match’ it to the required purpose (1994).

For example:

- a. screening tests identify children who are likely to be members of high risk groups;
- b. diagnostic tests confirm the presence and extent of a disability;
- c. program planning determines appropriate remediation;
- d. readiness testing ascertains a child’s relative knowledge of specific skills and information;
- e. achievement testing demonstrates the extent of a child’s previous accomplishments;

f. standardized tests such as those issued by government or state education departments to evaluate groups or to [statistically] compare one child or group with another. Standardized testing is one of the main methods of assessment for identifying progress in relation to the national curriculum in the United Kingdom (Johnson, Hill, Tunstall, 1993) and results of the tests are predominantly used for statistical analysis, particularly in comparing one group with another, one school with another (Genishi, 1992, p.3).

Those educators who recommend a traditional curriculum in early childhood are often wary of standardized testing especially those types of test which are used to 'grade children' or compare them statistically. Perhaps one of the main criticisms lies with the possible irrelevance of the test with the child's experience, thus producing invalid results. Similarly the tests may not relate to the curriculum followed in the class, and if this is a mandatory State test then there is a real danger that the curriculum will change and the teacher will 'teach to the test' (Decker et. al., 1980). In regard to testing in the USA Seefeldt (1990) said:

Despite the problems of testing young children we are witnessing the most blatant misuse of testing young children today. In many school systems children are being required to take a readiness test in order to be admitted to kindergarten, on the basis of a single test score, on tests that are of dubious value children are being denied access to education (p.281).

Indeed, a theme in recent literature regarding early childhood education discusses the inadequacy of standardized assessment to represent a child's skills, outcomes and growth potential (Mallory et al., 1994). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published a positional statement on standardized testing in early childhood programs, cited in Meisles (1992), which advocates the restriction of the use of such tests to "situations in which testing provides information that will

clearly contribute to improved outcomes for children" (p.55). The Education Departments of South Australia and Western Australia emphasized restraints on the use of standardized testing. The Education Department of South Australia (1989) stated:

If tests are used it is vital to ensure the measuring instrument will actually measure what it is intended to measure, yield accurate scores, and be relatively straightforward to administer, score and interpret.

However, the Education Department of Western Australia (1995b) noted the need for a balance between the informal and formal methods in saying:

Many early childhood educators express concern about the use of formal assessment methods such as standardized tests, rating lists and screening protocols in the early childhood area. Formal assessment does not capture the dynamic and highly interrelated nature of children's learning, and if overused can reinforce a 'work' rather than 'learning' orientation amongst students and parents. However, if selected judiciously, formal assessment or screening tasks can be useful diagnostic tools in identifying particular areas of need in individual learners (p.41).

Elkind, cited in Kagan, (1991), described standardized testing as reflecting psychometric philosophies used predominantly in the upper primary and secondary levels of schooling. He thus viewed an increase in the use of standardized tests in early childhood education as an indication of pressure from other areas of education. However, there is evidence that this may not be the case, in Australia at least. On the contrary there may be an increase in the use of informal methods in upper primary and secondary schooling. Broadfoot, referring to educators of all levels, (1992) wrote:

We must be prepared to abandon the traditional niceties of psychometric measurement priorities, important as some of these are, if we want to encourage different kinds of learning and more active involvement by students (p.11).

It must, however, be noted that at present there are no government-initiated standardized tests required in Western Australia as there are in the USA and UK.

Standardized tests used by the participants in this study, either of their own choice or by direction of the given SDP, will be documented in the results chapter and further discussed in chapter five.

Whatever the method used to gather information on children's progress, the gathered information must then be converted into records. Record keeping has become increasingly important (Decker, Decker 1980), especially in the light of accountability processes (Arthur, Beecher, Docket, Farmer, Richards, 1993). The methods to be used for recording children's progress not only reflect the curriculum philosophies but are selected according to the purpose of the given observation (Beaty.1994, Moyles.1992). Gammage (1997) illustrated the link between the recording method chosen and the purpose of assessment, shown in Figure 3. Certain methods 'match' the observation of the process of learning, others complement assessment in context, whilst other recording methods 'match' the observation of the product and another group of methods reflect decontextualized matters.

Anecdotal records are frequently used in early childhood, in which the observer briefly records one incident, dated and timed, preferably on an outline allowing for observer comments. These act as 'snapshots' into the individual child's development and are cumulative in providing information towards a child profile (Decker, Decker 1980). Running records are similar but they contain more detailed narrative of everything that happened over a given period of time, and are written at the time. Other 'child-study' methods include time sampling, event sampling, and sociograms (Arthur,et al. 1994).

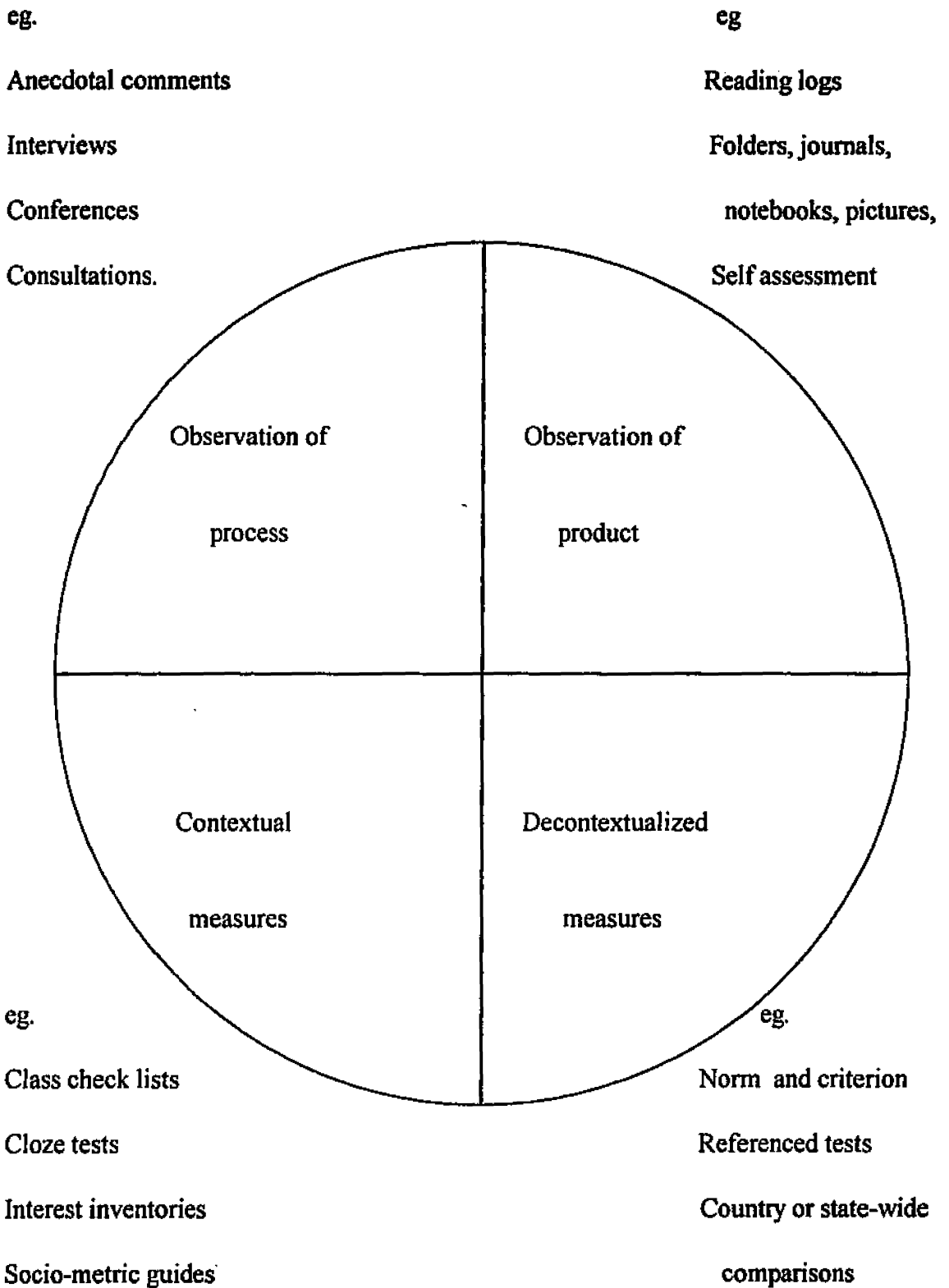


Figure 3. The match between methods of recording and purpose of assessment.
 (Gammage, 1997, p9)

The significance of student outcome statements in the formulation of the curriculum should also be noted here. Outcome statements are not in themselves a method of assessment but infer what is to be assessed; use of outcome statements requires that children are assessed in relation to those outcomes. The concept of outcomes should not be a problem to early childhood educators but currently the Student Outcome Statements circulated in Western Australia for use from kindergarten to year 12 [K to 12] do not seem to 'match' the traditional early childhood curriculum. The significance of this mis-match is that teachers, either as individuals or as groups, will need to produce and link outcomes related to developmental domains with the subject oriented statements required (EDWA,1996), or work to the prescribed outcome statements with the risk of altering the curriculum significantly. Gordon (1975) said:

Child profiles provide the educator with a broad and flexible framework which gives acknowledgment to the kaleidoscopic nature of child growth and learning. They help insure the relevance of the curriculum to the individual child as they experience change throughout their growth and development. If, on the other hand, core competencies or performance indicators were to become central to the curriculum, then the achievement of specific outcomes might come to form the basis of evaluation. This approach would restrict children's development and learning to the acquisition of easily organized, observable concepts (p.19).

Whichever end of the continuum regarding methods of gathering and recording information, it is clear that no one method is sufficient on its own. A variety of methods is required, over a period of time, to be incorporated into the day to day activities of the classroom (Halliwell, 1994).

2.4 Application of Assessment Data in Early Childhood Education

The use of assessment has traditionally fallen into two main categories, termed formative assessment and summative assessment (Decker et. al. 1980., Satterly,1987., Bredekamp,1987.). Formative assessment includes all the on-going assessment leading to curricular decisions regarding the individual, a group or a class. On the other hand, summative assessment takes place at the end of a given period within the curriculum leading to school level planning, placing of students for further learning, or providing comparative information at school/department, state or national levels. Formative assessment could be said to be measuring the process of learning whilst the summative could be said to measure the product of learning (Howell et. al. 1993). Recent Australian literature, however, expressed assessment in a slightly different way:

1. Those assessment tasks providing “information about individuals for their own benefit” (ACSA 1991, p.1); to “improve their (students’) learning and to improve the effectiveness of instruction (EDWA, 1996, p.15).
2. “Assessments (sic) which provide information about groups for the collective benefit. Information for collective benefit is obtained from representative groups considering their work on assessment tasks; these groups may be formed at the class, school, region, state or national level” (ACSA,1993a, p.1).

Teachers in the early childhood network of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) preferred to emphasize the first of the categories defined by ACSA (1994), in saying “The major purpose of assessment is to: 1. Provide information about individuals for their own and their families’ benefit.

2. Inform the child allowing for modification of behaviour and for allowing him/her to make 'informed decisions regarding consequences'.
3. Informing "the child, his/her teachers, family and other informed professionals on progress and strengths", for assistance in development and learning (Halliwell, 1994 p.B1).

Australian early childhood professionals stressed that all assessment should benefit the student in some way, warning against the introduction of assessment techniques which may lead to a decline in assessment that benefits the individual child. to a decline in the types of assessment benefiting the individual child. Perry, cited in Halliwell, (1994), and Campbell (1994), referred to the situation in the United Kingdom, where it would seem that the National Curriculum, together with its national testing system caused a strong emphasis on comparison of groups, schools and districts, with a decline in assessment for teacher-planning for the individual child.

More specifically use of assessment in early childhood include the following:

- a. instructional planning;
- b. identification of special need;
- c. program evaluation;
- d. basis for reporting learning or progress/communication with parents and other staff;
- e. continuity through the school.
- f. continuity to another school in the event of the child moving school.
- g. accountability. ((Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1992, P.44)

To these may be added student placement, not only as a result of referral to special needs areas, but also within the school, such as allocation to a 'split' class or a 'straight' class, and provision of data to be used comparatively (Lewey & Nevo, 1981).

On examining the above ways of using assessment data this author argues that assessment used for instructional planning and identification of special needs are ongoing processes leading to curriculum decisions to the benefit of the individual, group or class. In this sense, therefore, they may be classed as formative assessment. In contrast to this program evaluation, reporting to parents, reporting for continuity purposes and class placement of children all take place at the end of a given period and may be classed as summative assessment. In this sense assessment data produced in compliance with SDP requirements for the school MIS is also classed as under the same category. However, there is currently no form of summative assessment in Western Australian primary schools which gives comparative information between students, groups or schools, thus distinguishing the Western Australian system from the System in the United Kingdom.

In the current study teachers were asked about the use of their assessment data, in order to ascertain whether there was a trend away from the formative type of assessment toward the summative, or away from assessing the process toward assessing the product.

2.5 Historical Perspectives on Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Western

Australia

Curriculum is formed in response to the needs of the society in which it is embedded. Kraus (1993) stated:

We soon realize that curriculum and methodology are parts of society created by and for communities in which they exist. We recognize that the form and content of curriculum are intertwined with the social and intellectual values of the people they serve. They are shaped by the political and economic concerns and molded by physical and ideological realities (p16).

However, society is constantly changing. Australian society has become increasingly multi-cultural in recent years, creating a need for many cultures to be considered in educational planning. Matters of social justice have come to the fore. Similarly political and economic conditions have changed. Australian society has experienced a change in the driving force of education toward business and industry which have and are causing tremendous changes within educational curricula (Gifford, 1993). In this section some perspectives of the historical context of Western Australian curriculum for early childhood education are examined. McLean (1992) wrote:

Whilst early childhood education networks have had long-standing links with the major education systems, they have also maintained strong affiliations with health and family welfare services. With the exception of the early primary grades, substantial government involvement in the early childhood sector has occurred only in the last twenty years. Prior to that time early childhood education services were located almost entirely in community-based organizations. (p.45)

The literature examined so far focused on early childhood education as a whole, which currently serves children aged 0-8, but early childhood education in Western Australian schools serves children turning five in non-compulsory pre-primary classes through to children turning eight in Years 2 and 3 of compulsory schooling with proposals to include children turning four by providing Kindergarten classes in schools. (At present some children turning five are located in community-based pre-schools whilst the majority of children turning four are located in community-based facilities.) But this has not always been the case. Western Australian pre-school education (children turning five) was located almost entirely in community-based pre-schools under the auspices of the Western Australian Pre-school Board isolated from schools and from the Education Department. In this context early childhood education for children turning five was an isolated specialist area promoting and sustaining the traditional philosophies and beliefs

regarding early childhood curriculum. In addition, early childhood training for teachers in pre-schools was isolated from other teacher training institutions. Reflecting the trend in Australia, noted by McLean, changes have occurred in the last twenty years regarding Education Department involvement in pre-school education which had a significant impact on early childhood practices. For example:

1. Early childhood teacher education became incorporated into the newly formed Colleges of Education and later into the education faculties of universities, (1972 onward).
2. Incorporation of pre-schools into primary schools as pre-primary classes, (1975 onward).
3. A developing trend towards the devolution of curriculum decision-making away from highly centralized structures to schools in what became known as 'site-based curriculum development' (SBCD) (Woods, 1993. p27), (1987 onward).
4. Introduction of school development planning as part of the devolution process, (1990 onward).
5. Phasing out of specialist superintendents in the Education Department district offices including early childhood education superintendents, (1991 onward).
6. Introduction of full-time school-based pre-primary education, (1992 onward)

These changes meant that teachers trained in early childhood education found themselves in a minority, competing for funding and resources with other educators who did not, in the main, understand the traditional philosophies of early childhood education (Gifford, 1993). Pre-primary teachers who had previously enjoyed the support of colleagues who also understood the practices of early childhood education found themselves having to articulate early childhood curriculum in school development

planning. Gifford (1993) included these changes when she noted a number of challenges to those working in early childhood settings, particularly those in pre-compulsory years.

Challenge 1. Retaining the freedom to teach 'the early childhood way'.

Challenge 2. Maintaining parity for early childhood teachers in schools and other early childhood settings.

Challenge 3. Holding onto pre-compulsory schooling.

Challenge 4. Continuing to make inroads on the care/education split.

Challenge 5. Continuing the capacity of early childhood trained teachers to find employment in schools.

Challenge 6. Meeting the support needs of early childhood teachers.

Challenge 7. Retraining early childhood courses that meet the needs of the field.

Challenge 8. Determining the needs of the early childhood field.

Challenge 9. Keeping early childhood courses viable in the face of declining employment options in schools, pre-schools and child care.

(p.32)

Gifford (1992) stated that early childhood educators needed to "act as a united field" (p.32) in order to meet these challenges effectively. Since Gifford noted these challenges other changes have occurred which have been seen by some as being detrimental to the early childhood field, eroding the traditional foundations of the curriculum (Halliwell, 1993, Clyde, 1993). Some of these changes are:

1. The production of a National Curriculum Framework, built around eight subject-based learning areas throughout all years of compulsory schooling. (year 1 - year 10 in Western Australia). Initiated in 1989, this was "undertaken at the direction of the Australian Education Council (AEC), the national council of Ministers of

Education" (Francis.1996, p.3) It was anticipated that this would provide a common approach to curriculum across Australia.

2. The publication of Western Australian Student Outcome Statements (SOS) in 1994, published by the Western Australian Education Department. This resulted from the National Curriculum Framework and were also based on the eight learning areas (subjects). As a result a degree of centralized control over the curriculum was inferred:

Within an Education Department's framework, schools are responsible for their own development planning, financial management and accountability. A devolved system nevertheless required quality control, including the choice of syllabuses and use of teaching resources was considered to be best left to schools, the learning outcomes were to remain a systems responsibility (EDWA 1996, p.1).

The Western Australian SOS were "intended to establish concisely and effectively a curriculum framework for the work of government schools in Western Australia" (EDWA 1994, p.5). However, in contrast to the national curriculum framework it was intended for the kindergarten and pre-primary classes as well as mainstream schooling. The SOS were trialed in schools between 1994 and 1995. In the Report on the trials (1996) teachers reported that the "SOS provide a sound framework for judging student achievement" (p.15). In the same report, however, early childhood representatives made certain recommendations including one that documents be produced linking the learning areas articulated in the SOS with domains of development thus enabling teachers to develop an integrated approach to teaching and learning (p.46). The subject-based orientation of these curriculum documents do not encompass the early childhood education understanding and practice of curriculum. In addition the inclusion of two years of pre-compulsory education with

a common curriculum outcome to all other years of schooling makes it even more difficult for early childhood educators to maintain and articulate the philosophies and practices of early childhood curriculum in the school. It is anticipated that the SOS will be revised to suit the proposed Western Australian curriculum framework when it is produced, but will still be based on the eight learning areas.

3. A proposed Western Australian curriculum framework from kindergarten to year twelve (K-12) based on eight subject oriented learning areas, "providing a clear statement of what students are expected to have achieved as a result of K-12 education." (Banks and Hawke, 1996, p.1) To this end the Western Australian Curriculum Council was commissioned to specify design requirements for curriculum documents including an overarching document, eight learning areas (subject-based), support materials and a professional development plan for teachers (Tayler, 1996, P.8). It is significant that the Western Australian curriculum framework also refers to the two years of pre-compulsory schooling, kindergarten and pre-primary. It is anticipated that the first draft of this framework will be circulated in July, 1997, for a consultation period before being finalized ready for implementation in 1999. Both the Western Australian curriculum framework and the SOS will be used in Government schools.

The eight learning areas selected as the basis for the curriculum frameworks and the SOS are more suited to the philosophies and learning theories of the upper primary and high school levels rather than to early childhood classes, thus exerting pressures on the early childhood field. Tayler (1996) noted "Nowhere else in Australia am I aware of a council having jurisdiction over curriculum for four year olds. Nowhere in the world do I know of an effective learning program which frames curriculum for four year olds in

the way proposed by the Student Outcome Statements. The work of this body may push substantial changes into place for four year olds. Every early childhood professional should be active in scrutinizing developments in curriculum led by the Council (Tayler,1996, p.8).

Thus it may be seen that changes have occurred in the last twenty years exerting pressure on the field of early childhood education.

2.6 Responses of Early Childhood Educators to Change in Western Australia

It was noted in the previous section that early childhood educators need to present a united front in response to the changes which have taken place. They also need to articulate their position not only at classroom and school levels but also at the various levels of Australian education planning at Federal and State levels. Bryce (cited in Tayler,1996) stated:

Articulating your position at Centre and School levels is vital to ensuring developing plans and programs turn out to be the best we can possibly put together. Standing up and challenging any policy implementation which compromises the needs of young children is also part of our duty (p.10).

However, it is not enough to mount a challenge at centre and school levels. The challenge must also be faced at departmental and government levels to protect the field of early childhood education. The transactional theory on which this study is built emphasizes that occurrences in a microsystem are the product of transactions between other microsystems in a much wider context (Chapter 3). The following are some of the 'voices' challenging policy decisions which may have adverse effects on early childhood practices in Australia.

1. The Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA) is one of the main voices on behalf of early childhood educators in Australia. The AECA (in AECA, 1993) document entitled Working Position on Nationally Developed Profiles and Curriculum Statements (Appendix A), proclaimed the early childhood education perspective on nationally produced frameworks and outcome statements. It is a source of information on early childhood education matters for the early childhood field throughout Australia through its periodicals and other publications.
2. The 'Good Start' Program initiated within the Department of Education in Western Australia, (1995) (subsequently called the Early Childhood Education program) has targeted its efforts at raising the quality of early education for young children, many of which focus on describing and upholding best practice principles in the field of early childhood education (Tayler, 1996, p.7). One of the publications pertinent to this study was a draft document entitled "Guidelines for Appropriate Assessment and Accountability in the Early Years" (EDWA, 1995, p.9)
3. The Early Childhood Education Council, established in 1995, "advises the Minister for Education on strategic matters pertaining to early childhood provision. The council is in its early days but plans to work closely with the Interim Curriculum Council in the interests of ensuring high quality in early childhood curriculum" (Tayler, 1996, p.8).
4. The Strengthening the Early Years Professional Development Program, initiated by Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation, brought together early childhood educators in Western Australia in producing materials on a wide variety of issues facing early childhood teachers. Some of these were introduced at a conference in

April, 1997, and all are presented in a published package (1997.)

5. A Commonwealth government senate inquiry into early childhood education (July 1996) was initiated, part of its brief being to assess the extent to which the National Profiles and Statements incorporated developmentally appropriate practice.

Thus it is evident that early childhood educators are responding to the pressures of change within the wider contexts of education in Australia.

2.7 Other Trends Within the Early Childhood Education Field exerting Pressure on the Curriculum.

There have also been trends within the field of early childhood education which, in some part, could be linked to the historical changes outlined previously in the wider context of education structure.

Zimiles, quoted in Spodek (1986) said:

There is a danger that universal pre-school education when conducted under the auspices of the public schools [cf Australian State schools], will alter the character of early education, - partly by the nature of the bureaucratic quality of public schools that is likely to change the emotional climate of the pre-school classroom and the traditional academic focus of public schools. If, and when, pre-schools are appended to elementary schools and ultimately absorbed by them, as now seems probable, they will become incorporated into a body of educational thinking and programming that is primarily concerned with academic instruction. Early education will be under the aegis of educators who are for the most part unknowing about the developmental needs of the young child, about what young children need to know and how they learn (p.11).

These trends include:

1. The 'push down' of academics into early childhood education. The push for early academics began in the 1960s when J. S. Bruner asserted that children had a great capacity for learning in the early years and that academic instruction given in those

years was critical for later academic success. Bruner, (quoted in Elkind, 1987.), wrote: "Any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest way to any child at any stage of development" (p.57). Bruner recommended the use of reading, maths and science programs for young children. Since then there has been a trend toward academic demand in kindergarten and in pre-school in the USA with a more formal approach (Persky & Golubchick, 1991), driven by elementary school principals, and administrators, (Wortham, 1994). Graue's (1993) research on parent's expectations for school revealed that parents, particularly middle class parents, expected a focus on academic content as well as providing opportunities for social development. Graue noted that parents labeled activities as 'academic' if they included worksheets, required quiet work at a table, or involved reading and counting. They classed non-academic activities as noisy, active and creative. Thus a challenge arose in the USA on the traditional concepts of early childhood curriculum. Many early childhood educators have referred to this push for formal learning and for academics as a negative trend (Persky & Golubchick, 1991). Elkind (1987) said that "early academics put children at risk of stress in the short term and of personality damage in the long term" (p.4). These are predominantly American writers writing about education in the USA, but Bosich (1996) expressed concern over a possible 'push down' effect in Western Australia when she wrote concerning the co-location of early childhood centres on school sites. She said:

If primary practices are allowed to filter down into the early years and they become early formal learning centres, this would be disastrous for children. However, if the early childhood practices were allowed to filter up through the school there will be immense potential benefits for everyone" (p.4).

Stamopoulos (1995) found that the majority of primary school principals participating in her research "see pre-primary as a socialisation process or as

preparation for the primary schools, which was judged less critically than primary school" (p. 140). The majority were not primarily involved in the educational issues of the pre-primary, preferring to recognize the expertise of the pre-primary teachers in an area foreign to many of the principals. This research, therefore, showed evidence that in those selected schools primary school practices were not filtering down into the pre-primary. Nevertheless, the research also revealed the lack of professional development to principals on implementation of Ministry Guidelines and Policies in regards to pre-primary classes, nor on integration of independent pre-school into primary schools. Lack of professional development in this area may annul guidelines which maintained early childhood practices

2. Differences in understanding the term 'developmentally appropriate practice' (DAP). "Theoretical and pedagogical shifts have resulted in disagreement on what constitutes appropriate practice" (Tayler, 1996, p.4). At one extreme there are those who challenge the traditional beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice, focusing less on play and the environment and more on the delivery of child learning outcomes (Fleer, 1996, Kessler, 1991). Then there are those who have sought to expand on the Bredekamp style of DAP in response to new understandings of child development, such as the introduction of the transactional dimension in which the individual changes the situation even as it changes him or her (Mallory et. al. 1994). This is an understanding of development that relates not only to the lives of the children but also to the lives of adults, both teachers and parents, and the cultural and societal contexts in which the children and adults live. Whilst promoting the importance of child development Bronfenbrenner (cited in Mallory et. al. 1994) regarded notions of developmental stages, milestones and domains, all of which

were promoted by Bredekamp, as outmoded. "He calls upon us to formulate new conceptualizations of development that recognize the unique reciprocal relationship between each individual and the environment." (p.109) He outlined "an approach that viewed development in a set of widening contexts," recommending that changes in a child's behaviour be interpreted in "the light of both immediate and distant social and physical environments in which the child lived."(p.110). In recent years there has also been a growing understanding of context in relation to child development. It has been noted that "transactions between individuals and environment occur in different ways and with varying results in diverse contexts" (Bronfenbrenner.1979, p.20). What is considered to be appropriate practice in one culture or societal context may be inappropriate in another context.

2.8 Accountability

The concept of accountability is important in this study in that assessment of children's progress is a major part of the accountability process particularly through the School Development Plan of each school. There has been an increasing emphasis on accountability during the last twenty five years. Ebbeck, (1994) and Ministry of Education, Western Australia (1989) were agreed that teachers were accountable before the recent emphasis on accountability. The Western Australian Ministry of Education reported that teachers have always "accepted responsibility for improving student outcomes and reporting on student performance" (1989, p. .3). The report continued "To this extent accountability is a well established practice within the teaching community." Nevertheless, each state in Australia developed accountability policies and strategies which are mandatory in each state school. The Western Australian policy specified:

1. All schools will monitor their performance in relation to the purpose and performance indicators described in their school development plan .
2. All schools are required to respond to their own performance information through their school development planning.
3. Each principal is accountable to a District Superintendent for the performance of the school.
4. Each principal is required to give an account of the performance of the school to the school decision-making group through the school development plan. (Ministry of Education, 1991.p.4)

In addition the Ministry of Education stated: "Schools must demonstrate that they are performing effectively in terms of the education the students are receiving. . . It is a matter of quality assurance" (1991, p.3). This paper focused particularly on assessment/evaluation requirements in regard to student performance, requiring the collection of information about student performance in areas relevant to the performance indicators, the main source of which was to be student achievement data used routinely by each teacher in the classroom. After a specified process of analysis of the gathered data judgments were to be made identifying priority areas for improvement and strategies developed for implementation based on those judgments.

It is evident from this rationale that teachers no longer demonstrated their accountability in terms of the programs they produced, but in terms of student achievement levels measured alongside the expected student outcomes of the program. Gathered assessment information from these were then to be "compared with the criteria which the school had set" (Ministry of Education, 1991, p.4). Thus it is evident

that assessment and evaluation play an integral part in the accountability process in Western Australian schools. Indeed, assessment and evaluation is believed by many educators to be a key element in accountability of teachers and schools (eg. Lewey & Nevo, 1981; Education Department of South Australia, 1989). It must be noted, however, that the accountability guidelines did not state how assessment and evaluation were to be implemented. The performance indicators, the learning/teaching strategies, and the methods of evaluation were to be a matter for the school collaborative planning bodies to decide and once the strategies had been accepted within each school, then they became mandatory for each staff member involved. However, this devolution of responsibility was modified with the introduction of Student Outcome Statements which will form the framework for the school development plan assessment. School collaborative planning committees will still be responsible for the methods of assessment and evaluation. It was reported:

A devolved system nevertheless required quality control. While the delivery of the curriculum including the choice of syllabuses and use of teaching resources was considered to be best left to schools, the learning outcomes were to remain a system responsibility. A set of statements describing what students could be expected to achieve at each stage of schooling was seen to be needed as the focus for school development planning, curriculum delivery and accountability (EDWA, 1996, p.1.).

The methods selected for collection of information on children's progress, the amount of information required, and the use of that information were still a matter for each school staff to decide. At this point, there may be a conflict in philosophies between early childhood teachers and other teaching staff in the primary school as discussed earlier in this chapter, a conflict which must be resolved in the interests of children and for the purpose of accountability. There are, however, several points arising from the literature regarding accountability of early childhood educators particularly bearing in

mind that the teacher still collects information on children's progress in areas not covered by the school development plan priorities. The early childhood teacher needs :

1. To collect data with learning and teaching in mind, not just as an accountability exercise. It was reported that "collecting assessment data that is not used to develop the teacher/learning program is time-wasting 'busy' work which removes the concept of accountability from the context of learning and teaching" (EDWA, b,1995).
2. To fulfill the whole of the accountability cycle as shown in figure 4, not just to produce data supporting the achievement of student outcomes or an achievement test set at state or national levels to meet arbitrary standards (Tayler,1996. P4).

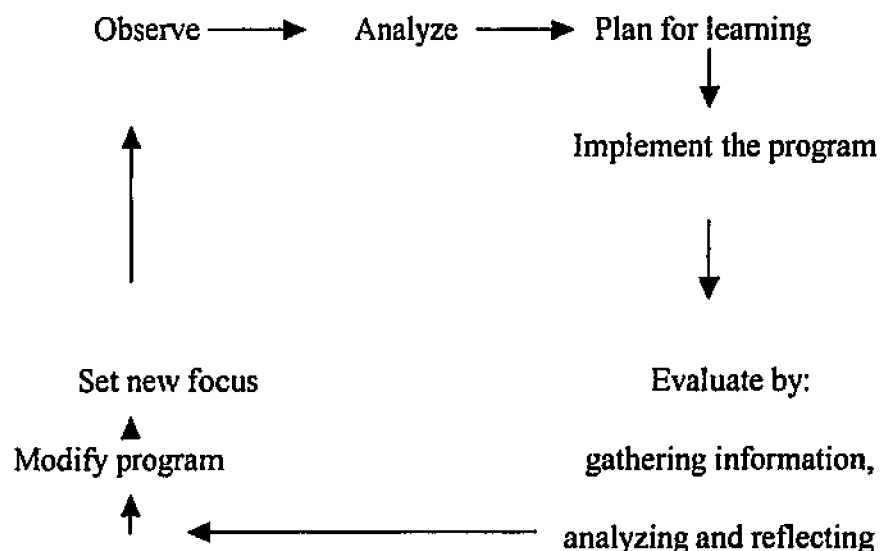


Figure 4. The Accountability Cycle (EDWA, 1995, b, p.38)

3. "To be able to reflect current research and ideas in their early childhood practice" (Arthur, 1993, p.78).

4. "To articulate what children are gaining from early childhood programs" (Schwartz & Robinson, 1982, p. ix).
5. "To report publicly about achievements in relation to their planned program goals and to parents and carers on goals and outcomes for individual children" (Department of Education and Children's Services, SA, 1996, p. 63)

The Education Department of Western Australia (1995) expanded the accountability cycle (Figure 5) to illustrate the complementary and integrated nature of the "monitoring undertaken in relation to Student Outcome Statements, School Management Information Systems (MIS) and the classroom program" (p. 53).

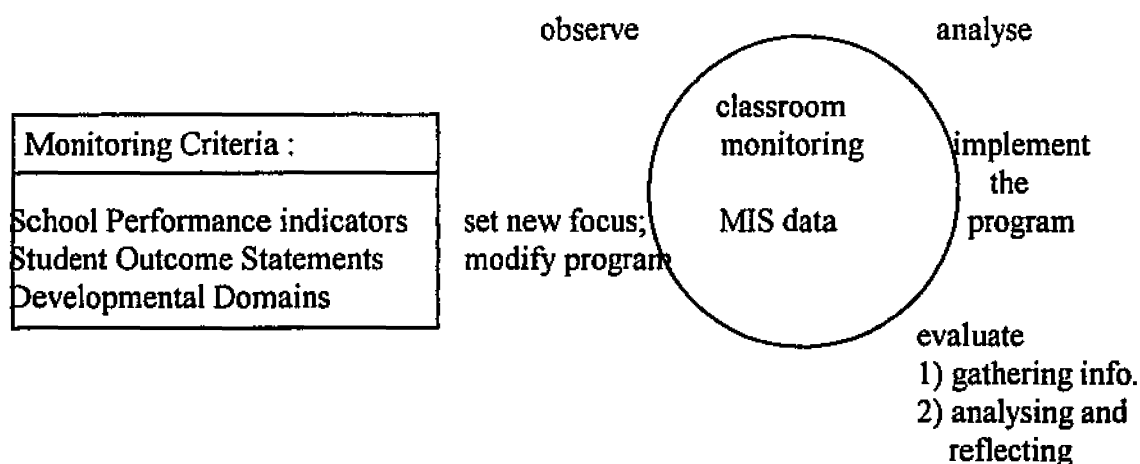


Figure 5 "The Accountability Cycle revisited" (Education Department of Western Australia, 1995, b, p. 53)

This study examines the use of assessment and evaluation in six Western Australian pre-primary classes. Since accountability was one use of assessment and evaluation cited in the literature, (section 2,4 of this study), this study also explores how gathered data on children's progress was being used for accountability purposes. The school development plan is possibly the major accountability strategy in the school but

this only covers priority areas decided upon by planning groups. However teachers assess and evaluate in all areas of the curriculum. Three further questions emerge as a result:

- a. Was any of the assessment and evaluation material which was gathered but not required for the SDP considered to be for the use of accountability and other purposes?
- b. Were the assessment records gathered for the priority areas also used in other ways?
- c. Were any other assessment/evaluation requirements made of the teacher for the purpose of accountability?

The purpose of accountability, therefore will be discussed further in chapter 5 of this study.

2.9 Reporting

There has been an increased emphasis on reporting both in educational literature and in policy. Griffin and Nix (1991) defined reporting in schools as the:

Process of transmitting information to stakeholders to create an awareness of and interest in the policies, goals, operations and achievements of the school, the students, the teachers and the school community in general (p. 7).

They also suggested that the term reporting "usually describes the formal procedures within schools, whereby teachers prepare written statements for parents about student achievement" (p.6). More recently Deschamp (1996,) described the element of reporting in the early years as "sharing information with others" (p.45), describing processes of interaction with the children, with parents, with other teachers, and school principals in the accountability process, but focusing attention on reporting to parents on student progress. In 1995 the Western Australian Department of Education required

each school to "institute a system of reporting on individual student progress that is based on a common standards framework and is acceptable to parents, the community, government and educators (EDWA 1995a, p.14).

Formal reporting to parents has for many years been common practice in primary and secondary schools. Griffin and Nix (1991) stated: "Reporting usually describes the formal procedures within schools whereby teachers prepare written statements for parents about student achievement" but this type of reporting has not been a common in pre-compulsory early childhood settings. This is not to say that early childhood teachers have neglected reporting to parents. The form of reporting has more usually been informal communication about the child or through more formal interview techniques rather than provision of a formal written progress report. Halliwell (1994) wrote: "because early childhood education involves collaboration with each child's family informal, verbal discussions are seen as an essential basis for sharing information (p.62). There is evidence, however, in recent years of a growing pressure upon early childhood teachers to produce some form of written report to parents as well as other informal methods, a factor which is explored in this study. The Guidelines for Appropriate Assessment and Accountability in the early years state:

Written summaries of progress provide a useful overview for the parents of the child's development, as well as guiding and focusing the teacher's comments during parent interviews or case conferences. Progress summaries presented in the form of formal academic reports are inappropriate in the early years of schooling (EDWA, 1995,b, p.48)

Indeed with the increased emphasis on accountability there has been an increase in recent research into reporting, particularly to parents, by the Education Department of Western Australia. The department carried out a series of surveys with teams of administrators, teachers, and parents, covering all aspects of reporting to parents,

together with case studies of various schools regarding their reporting techniques. (Deschamp, 1996). In these reports pre-primary classes were not mentioned as a special entity, nor was it made clear whether pre-primaries had been included within the selected primary school surveys. In the main teachers believed that the following strategies were most effective in communicating with parents,

Parent interviews;

Work samples sent home with written comments;

An efficient, flexible system;

Parent evenings;

Interim Reports;

Parent contact when student obviously needs assistance.

(Deschamp, 1996, a, p.28).

Parents commented that they wanted as much information as possible, early information if student was experiencing difficulties, opportunities to discuss the child's progress with the teacher, and personal comments on written reports. (Deschamp, 1996, a, p.1).

Suggested strategies for sharing with parents their child's progress in the early years were:

1. Parent/teacher interviews allowing discussion of the child's development in a relaxed, informal way, or a home communication book to be used where it is impossible to attain regular face-to-face contact with parents or where an intervention strategy required constant shared-monitoring,
2. Case conferences taking on a more formal nature, including the teacher, parents and other professionals in relation to a particular need of a child.

3. Assessment portfolios which illustrate a child's progress over a period of time.
4. Written summaries of progress. (EDWA 1995,b, p.48)

It has already been stated that formal academic reports were considered inappropriate for the early years (EDWA.1995, b). However, it has also been pointed out in this chapter that there are various pressures for a more academic program being exerted on early childhood educators. At the same time schools in Western Australia have been required to formulate reporting policies where pre-primary teachers are in a collaborative planning situation regarding reporting strategies. One of the considerations of the current study, therefore, was to ascertain how participating teachers shared information about children's progress with parents, and if this included a written report, the form of the report and whether it was the result of school requirements. Deschamp (1996, a) reported that although in one instance the written reports of the given primary schools varied in the degree of formality and the degree of academic content, the main difference between the reports of the primary schools and the secondary schools reflected primary and secondary educational philosophies and practices. The integrated documents of the primary schools reported on the 'whole' child, focusing on the academic and social development of the child (p.117). The reporting strategies required in the six case study classes participating in this study were examined in the light of the above literature.

2.10 Time Spent in Assessment Related Tasks.

In 1981, Clift (cited in Chazan et. al. 1987) expressed the feeling that "much valuable information about pupils and their learning habits was lost because primary

teachers had insufficient time to keep detailed notes" (p.197). Satterly (1981) said: "remember that every moment spent in formal assessment is time taken from actual teaching(p.5). Time is seen to be a matter of concern in regard to assessment and evaluation tasks. Research concerning the effects of the British National Curriculum on early childhood education collected by Campbell (1992) revealed the increasing amounts of mandatory assessment required particularly at school and system levels mainly in the form of academic testing, which appears to have been to the detriment of the teacher's own assessment practices for everyday planning purposes. It may be argued that the British national curriculum is a full curriculum in contrast to the curriculum framework and that children in Britain are required to complete standardized tests at given stages of schooling whereas in Western Australia no such tests are currently required. However, with increasing focus on accountability there may be an increase in time spent on assessment and evaluation tasks in Western Australia which may be a concern to some teachers. In 1996 the Education Department reported that:

Concern was still expressed about the amount of time spent on the quest for 'proof' or evidence of a student's level of achievement over a period of time. (EDWA, 1996.p23) . . .The number of assessment records required per term needed to be quite low so that teachers can teach material effectively and aren't caught up in a constant cycle of marking (p.24).

Participants in this study were questioned about their concerns on assessment and evaluation. Chapters 4 and 5 table the results from these questions and further discuss whether time was in fact a concern to them.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature on some of the major elements affecting assessment and evaluation practices in early childhood education, with particular reference to pre-compulsory levels of schooling, those of pre-primary and kindergarten classes. It examined traditional early childhood education curriculum including assessment and evaluation, exploring some of the pressures exerted upon it in the last twenty years. It examined literature on methods of gathering and recording children's progress, and the use of those records in early childhood education. Further it explored the position of the place of assessment and evaluation in the school development plan considering this in the context of accountability. The following chapter describes the research methods used in the process of carrying out this study.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify how and why teachers in selected metropolitan pre-primary classes gathered and recorded information on children's progress, how that information was used both at class and school levels, and how all these elements related to the teachers' responsibilities as articulated in their SDPs. Early childhood teachers gather and record information on children's progress in all areas of their development and in certain learning areas such as literacy, regardless of priority areas of the SDP. The assessment requirements articulated in the SDP relate to the priority areas selected by the staff for the particular school year and are either additional to that already planned by the teacher or are a substitute for the methods that would normally have been used in the particular priority area.

In ascertaining teachers' selection of methods it was helpful also to ascertain the reasons why teachers selected as they did. This was done in order to explore the possibility that underlying factors may have influenced them in their choices such as each teacher's training, teaching experience, preferred frameworks of curriculum planning and professional development.

As stated in the introduction an SDP is a major tool of accountability within the school which uses assessment of student progress as the main data for proving that accountability. Questions were therefore included concerning use of collected information, not only by teachers and other personnel in the school, but also in relation to the teacher's responsibility as articulated in the SDP. The purpose was not to compare one school with another, since to do this would be to ignore the fact that collaborative planning procedures such as the formation of the SDP are designed to

enable the school to best 'fit' the local community. Each school's response to this accountability process is essentially different. The purpose was, therefore, to examine what was actually happening in each of the participating schools in regard to the selection of methods of gathering and recording children's progress. It was recognized that the data could not be used to make generalizations, both from the point of view of the number of participants involved and the unique nature of the SDP to each school. However, it was hoped that patterns might emerge giving some indication of possible changes to assessment methods and use at the pre-primary level. Since curriculum and assessment are closely linked indication of change in assessment methods would be likely also to indicate change or impending change in the pre-primary curriculum.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on the transactional theory of development as expounded by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Kagan (1991), Mallory (1994), and Day (1983), but also takes into account subsequent refinements of this theory. Transactional theory assumes that two major factors influence the development of the individual, genetics and environment. It also suggests that the environmental influence is not only exerted on the individual but that there is a reciprocal influence exerted on the environment. Development occurs as a result of environmental transactions. Also embedded within this theory is the belief that the way an individual develops results from his/her modification, re-organization, interpretation and perceptions of experiences encountered within the given environment (Day, 1983). Day reflected transactional theory in his model of human development shown in Figure 6.

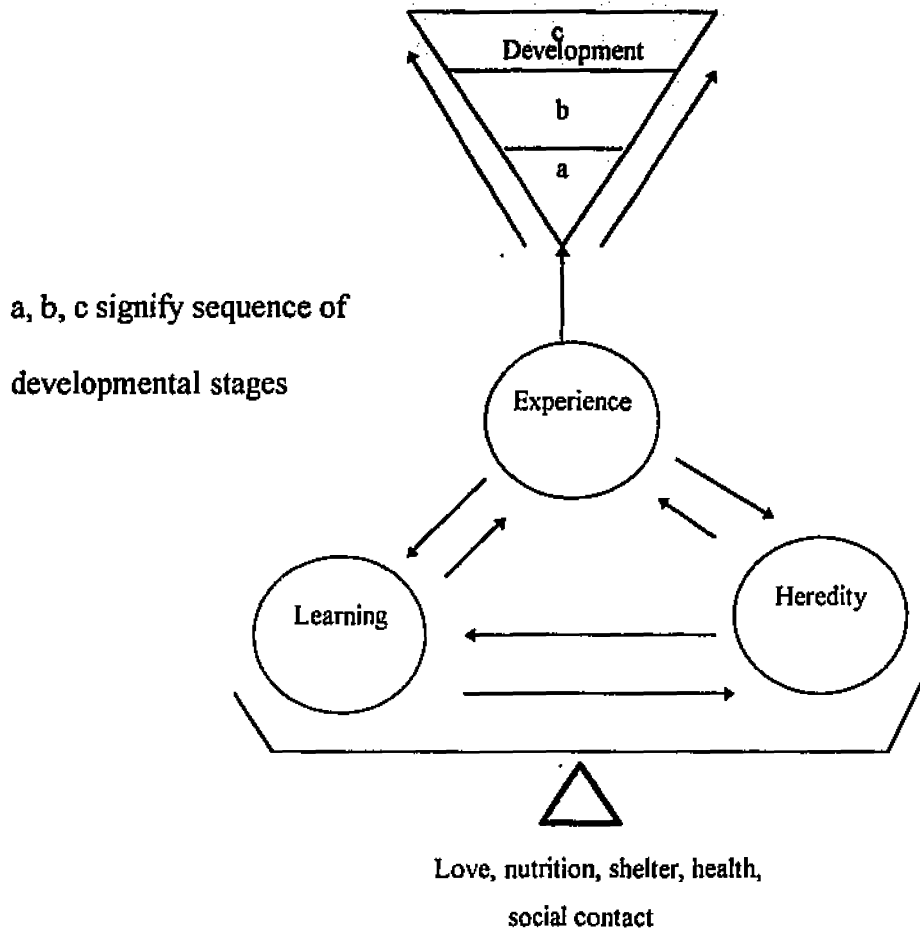


Figure 6. A transactional model of human development. (Day, 1983, p.97)

It may be seen from this figure that heredity, learning and experience are interrelated components leading to the development of the individual which pivot on the underlying foundation of love, nutrition, shelter, health and social contact. Day held the view that development of the individual is continuous and proceeds through a sequence of developmental stages, each stage being dependent on the preceding one. Bronfenbrenner (cited in Mallory, 1994), however, classed developmental stages, milestones and domains as outmoded notions, focusing instead on “new conceptualizations of development that recognize the unique reciprocal relationship between each individual and the environment” (p. 109). This change in the focus on development of the individual was reflected in the literature concerning changes in the

understanding of developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood settings and provided a basis for examining assessment and evaluation in contextual terms. Central to transactional theory is the belief that development occurs as the individual is exposed to stimuli. Gordon stated "behaviour and development is a continuous process of transactions between the child's biological organism and his socio-physical environment" (1975, p. 2). However, the child is not viewed as a passive learner but as a being who interacts with the environment and with other people in a process of learning. In other words he is viewed as a being not only influenced by the environment and other people but also as exerting influence in a reciprocal manner. Sameroff, cited in Mallory (1994), proposed a transactional model that analyzed development in these reciprocal terms. The model highlights the importance of examining context when studying factors involving the development of children and is of significance when examining evaluation practices in pre-primary since evaluating young children's progress is inseparable from evaluating their development. The theory suggests that developmental changes cannot be captured by observing specific behaviours at isolated times but only by observing patterns of actions over time and in different settings (Mallory, 1994, p. 110), highlighting another aspect of transactional theory. Bronfenbrenner believed that whilst many researchers had examined the effects of the immediate setting of the developing individual, very few had looked at the implications of the wider environment. He wrote that:

1. The developing person is viewed as a growing, dynamic entity that progressively moves into and restructures the milieu in which it resides.
2. The environment also exerts its influence - mutual accommodation.
3. The environment is not just an immediate setting but is extended to incorporate interconnections between such settings and to external influences from the larger

surroundings (1979, p. 6)

Bronfenbrenner organized both types of environmental influences into clusters resembling nests of Russian dolls, one cluster nestling into the next. These clusters he termed the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem as shown in figure 7.

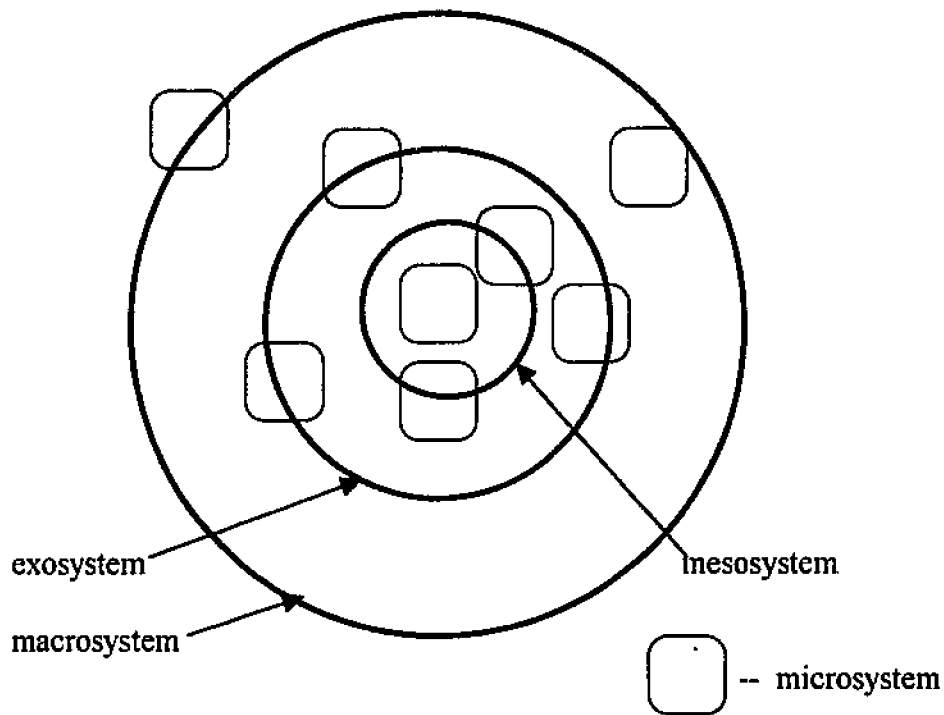


Figure 7. Clusters of environmental influences.

The term microsystem refers to the immediate setting of the individual at a given time. It involves a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations expressed by the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) An individual may be a member of more than one microsystem but only operates in one such setting at any given time. Thus, in Figure 8, the pre-primary class is presented as a central microsystem for the purpose of this current study. However, a major microsystem in which a young child operates is the home and family, and the inter-connections between home/family and the pre-primary settings are of great importance in the education of the child. For this reason the two microsystems of home and pre-school settings are shown in the centre of

the mesosystem.

The mesosystem comprises the interrelations of two or more microsystems in which the individual actively participates. Figure 8 presents day-care settings and sports clubs as interrelated microsystems which may be relevant to some children as part of the mesosystem, as well as the primary school in which the pre-primary class is situated, and other pre-primary classes in the same school. It is argued here that the young child operates in the microsystem of the class but that this class is very much a part of the primary school. The child may participate to varying extents in the microsystem of the school but for the main part operates in the class. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that interconnections between these microsystems can be as decisive for development as events taking place within a given setting, not only when the child operates in the various settings, but also as a result of other people providing links or mediation between microsystems. (p. 256)

The exosystem consists of settings in which the individual is not even present, because the interactions which occur within them affect the happenings within the microsystem containing the developing person. On the surface, the settings in the exosystem may appear to exert a one-way influence on the microsystem but deeper analysis exposes interconnections by means of individuals acting as mediators or links between settings, in communications such as face to face encounters, telephone conversations, correspondence, social network chains, chains of authority. They facilitate the transactional process. Figure 8 shows the Education Department, given teacher training institutions, and teaching experiences as part of the exosystem.

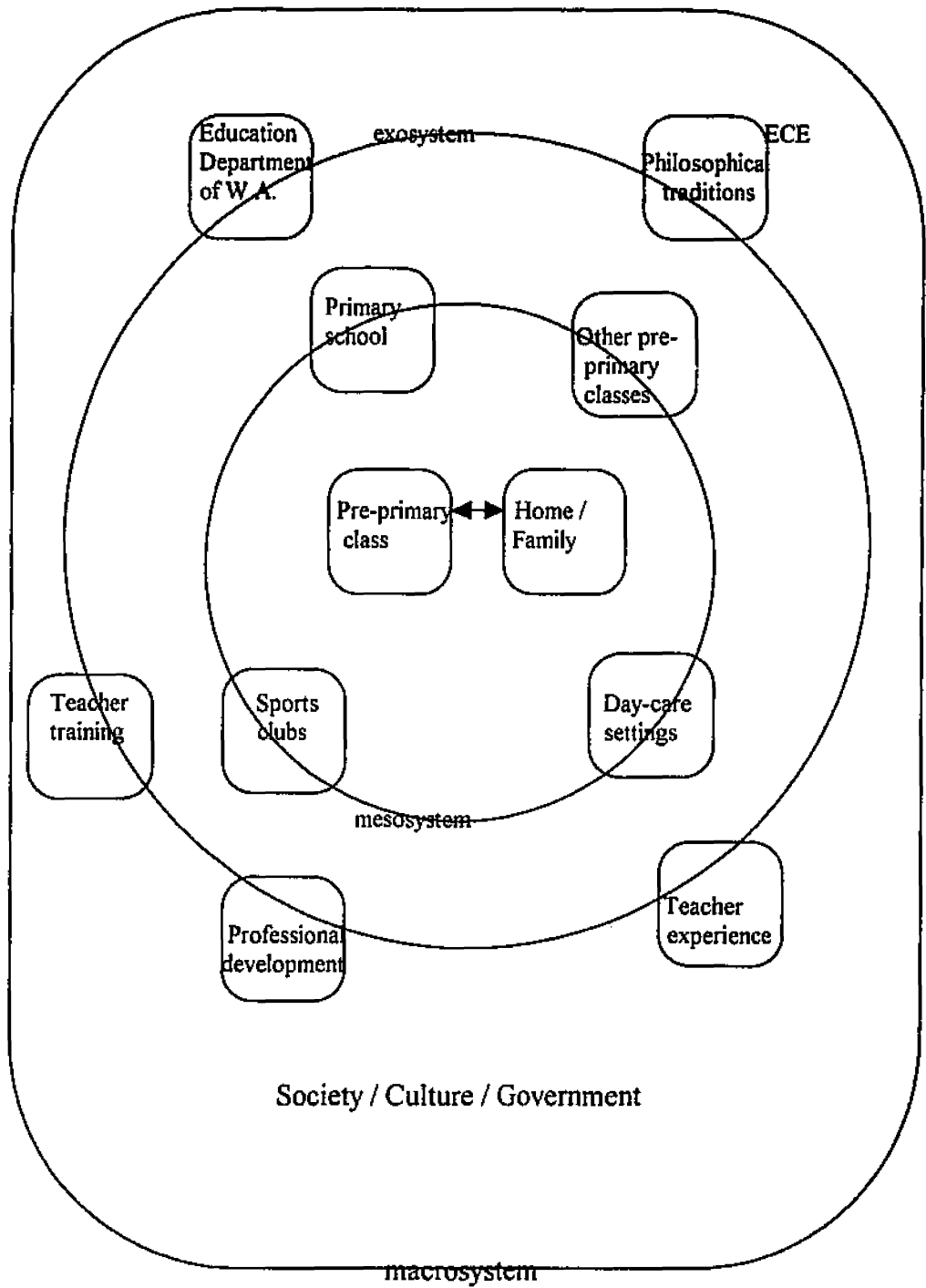


Figure 8. Environmental settings which may influence what is happening within the pre-primary class.

The macrosystem refers to the all-encompassing environment or culture of the given microsystem.

Kraus wrote:

We soon realize that curriculum and methodology are plots of society created by and for the communities in which they exist. We recognize that the form and context of the curriculum are intertwined with the social and intellectual values of the people they serve. They are shaped by the political and economic concerns and molded by physical and ideological realities. (1993, p. 16)

In recent years the process of devolution in education has been increasing, giving more responsibility for planning to schools. Thus each school has a collaborative planning group or series of groups responsible for planning such things as goals, indicators of success, strategies to be used and assessment practices in relation to priority areas also determined by collaborative planning. There has also been more emphasis on parent and community input in various aspects of school planning. Thus, in transactional terms, there is constant transaction occurring among the interrelating microsystems around the pre-primary class whilst at the same time there is a constant process of transactions among the other systems of the ecology (Figure 8) with various individuals and committees working as mediators. In each transaction there is a two-way influence exerted. What actually happens in the classroom, therefore, is the product of many transactions at various levels of the ecology.

Satterly (1981) indicated a further development in this theory, that of the influence of transactions taking place between the teacher and students within the microsystem of the class. He said:

While we assess our children they are assessing us although consequences are one sided because of an unequal share of power. Their assessment of us affects their attitudes to learning and leads to the formation of their views about us as worthy (or unworthy!), of their respect or even (most awe-inspiringly of all) as a model for themselves to aspire to, but it is our assessment of them which shapes their educational opportunities . . . (p. 45)

This current study was designed to examine assessment practices in pre-primary both in the context of teachers' own assessment of children's progress and of the school development plan in relation to the school priority areas. It is argued here that the policies formulated by the Education Department impact on what occurs in the school and in the classroom and that there are many interconnecting strands in the formulation of those policies. Teacher training institutions and teacher experience may seem a little more remote, but these also influence decisions about what happens in the classroom, including methods selected for gathering and recording information on children's progress within the context of the school development plan.

3.3 Choices in Paradigm and Strategies Used.

A naturalistic paradigm was adopted in this present study, incorporating qualitative methods. This was the most appropriate approach given the nature of the proposed inquiry described in the foregoing sections. Whilst some elements of the research questions could have been answered quantitatively other elements relating to how and why certain methods were used, together with elements examining relationships within the proposed study, more appropriately necessitated the use of qualitative methods. The proposed research particularly focused on interrelationships within the environment, thus requiring examination of ways in which individuals interpreted the environment and chose to respond to it, a factor which called for a naturalistic approach. (Jongeling, 1993)

The choice of naturalistic inquiry was believed by some researchers to place limitations on the validity of the data obtained. Many proponents of rationalistic paradigms argue that generalizations cannot be made in qualitative studies on the basis that "they do not pass empirical and logical tests that characterize formal (scientific)

generalizations (Stake 1978.6) but Stake asked the question: "Does this matter?" He pointed out that the naturalistic generalizations seldom take the form of prediction (as in scientific inquiry) but lead regularly to expectations. They guide action. In fact they are deemed inseparable from action (Kemmis, cited in Stake, 1978, p. 6). A new language arose in naturalistic paradigms to account for the trustworthiness of a study. Validity and ability to generalize were replaced by factors of credibility and transferability, reliability and objectivity were replaced by dependability and confirmability as terms to describe trustworthiness in naturalistic study. For these reasons neither the small number of participants, nor the inability to generalize, were viewed as limitations to the study.

In this research a case-study approach was selected. Although this approach may in some cases be used in quantitative research, it is one of the major approaches indicative of the naturalistic paradigm. Stake wrote "In social sciences, most case studies feature descriptions that are complex, holistic and involving a myriad of not highly isolated variables" (1978, p. 7) He added that data are likely to be gathered at least partly by personal observation, with an informal narrative writing style possibly with verbatim quotation. In addition Yin (1989) stated:

In general case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context (p.13).

Since the proposed research met all these criteria the case study method was selected. However, it was decided to use the process of random selection in determining the potential participants. Although random selection is usually related to quantitative research approaches, the researcher believed that random selection would enhance credibility and transferability of the research data. Further to this it was decided to use

in-depth interviews as the main method of data collection with examination of relevant written material. Questionnaires were considered as an alternative method but the personal approach of in-depth interviewing was preferred, particularly in view of the fourth research question in which the researcher would be required to search for interrelationships between teacher action and the SDP. It was decided that a questionnaire would necessitate very specific questions with little flexibility and a high possibility of misconstruing of terms by the respondents. Also of concern was the possible difficulty of achieving acceptable participation levels in the return of questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, would enable the interviewer to confirm mutual understanding of terms used and would allow flexibility to explore phenomena in each case setting at the same time as working within a question guide-line. However, it was decided to run a pilot study designed to trial both interview questions and techniques before conducting the case-study interviews.

3.4 The Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in which interview questions and techniques were trialed with two pre-primary teachers not involved in the main study, and a professional conversant with research techniques. The purpose of this was to:

Refine the interview technique;

Ascertain the number of interviews likely to be needed;

Provide information on relevant field questions;

Provide information on the length of interviews;

Lay a foundation for field interviews which would allow for maximum replication;

Ascertain the success or otherwise of using a tape recorder for the duration of the interview.

The results of the pilot study are presented in the following chapter. On the basis of these results some questions were rephrased; the three originally proposed interviews with each teacher were reduced to two longer interviews, and the rigid question format designed to promote replication was altered to a conversational style of interview.

The use of a tape recorder at each pilot study interview was requested and agreed to, the success of which prompted the decision to request the use of a tape recorder during the case-study interviews.

3.5 Ethics Considerations.

Once the proposed research study had been accepted by the Ethics Committee of Edith Cowan University the researcher visited the selected schools and approached the principals for permission to gather data in their schools. A letter outlining the nature of the research, how and why their school had been chosen and what would be involved in the data collection process was given to the principal together with another similar letter, addressed to the pre-primary teacher for their consideration. (Appendix B) If both the principal and the pre-primary teacher agreed to participate in the study a Form of Consent was obtained from both parties before the first interview commenced. (Appendix C)

3.6 The Case Studies.

The case study method designed in the current research involved six full-time pre-primary classes. Yin (1989) asserted that the use of three case studies are sufficient to allow analytic generalization in that if similar results are obtained in all three cases then replication may be said to have occurred. (p. 14) The results might then be accepted for a greater number of cases. His assertion can, however, be challenged as selection of

cases may have a substantial bearing on the results. Indeed, the results of the research may indicate differences between cases rather than homogeneity. The proposed research included the examination of assessment methods used by pre-primary teachers in the context of the school development plan but the extent to which pre-primary classes were included in their particular SDP during its formation seemed to vary widely. Thus six cases were selected with the expectation that differences and similarities could be explored with the possibility of seeking emerging patterns rather than necessarily seeking replication.

3.7 The Participants.

The six participant schools were determined through the process of random selection from within three Perth Metropolitan School Districts. Two schools were drawn from each district. The three districts were chosen because they were grouped together in provision of school services from January 1996, as part of one region. The researcher considered that selection from only one district may not reflect the region. At the beginning of the study the three districts were loosely grouped together whilst still maintaining their own superintendents thus giving a greater possibility for diversity amongst the schools. The participants were selected from the schools which offered full-time pre-primary programs in 1996, because this is the direction that pre-primary education is taking in Western Australia.

Of the first six schools randomly selected all principals agreed on condition that the pre-primary teachers were willing to participate. Two teachers declined to take part in the study, each from different districts. A further two schools were randomly selected and the principals approached. The teachers of these two schools agreed to take part. Three of the six case study schools had two full-time pre-primary classes. In each case

the principal selected the teacher to be approached. All the selected schools had 'on-site' pre-primary classes, although this was not a selection criterion.

3.8 Data Gathering

Table 1 illustrates an overview of the data gathering procedures used in relation to the research questions. The processes used for data collection were grouped together into two stages. The first stage focused mainly on the research questions 1 and 2 and the second stage mainly around the research questions 3 and 4, although there was a degree of overlap in relating to the research questions. The first stage comprised acquisition of a copy of the school development plan, an interview, a rating scale, and study of examples of teachers' recorded information, whereas the second stage consisted of one in-depth interview.

A single, structured interview guide was used for the first in-depth interview held with each participant (Appendix D). The guide mainly focused on what methods were used by the teacher to gather and record information on children's progress and the reasons why those methods were chosen. However, simply asking participants why they used particular methods was insufficient especially in the light of the transactions between other environmental systems upon the microsystem. Some questions were designed, therefore, to examine other possible influences from other systems in the environment. For example, Question 7, was designed to ascertain underlying philosophical influences which may have had a bearing on the methods chosen by the participant in examining the underlying curricular frameworks preferred by the teacher, whilst Questions 10, 17, 18 and 19 examined the possible experiential influences which may have affected teacher choice of methods and techniques, for example teacher training, teaching experience and professional development. Table 1 illustrates the data

gathering techniques used in the study.

| <u>Table 1. Data Gathering Techniques</u> | |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Research questions 1 and 2</p> | <p><u>Interview 1</u> Methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress Reasons why these methods were used.</p> <p><u>Rating scale</u> To indicate the priority of methods used to gather and record information</p> <p><u>Observation</u> Study of examples of teacher records of information on children's progress</p> |
| <p>Research questions 3 and 4</p> | <p><u>Interview 2</u> Links between the SDP and the methods chosen</p> <p><u>Use of recorded information</u> Possible influences on methods used</p> |

Some of the recorded information on children's progress was also analyzed for the purpose of confirming respondents' interpretation and perspectives on types of data gathering techniques and recording methods. At the conclusion of the first interview a rating scale was introduced and left with each participant to determine the most/least used methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress by each teacher (Appendix E). In addition a copy of the School Development Plan was obtained from each of the selected schools.

The second interview was semi-structured and based on a common framework, an example of which is presented in Appendix F, but was individualized according to the relevant school development plan. The questions focused on the use of the recorded information on children's progress and examined links between the methods chosen and the SDP, relating particularly to the third and fourth research questions. Again, in this interview some of the questions were designed to examine other possible influences and/or reasons for both method selection and use of the gathered information, such as requirements stipulated by the principal. The second interview also included questions arising from analysis of the first interview for the purpose of clarification.

3.9 Research Interviews

Interview 1. (relating to research questions 1 and 2)

The interview schedule was presented in Appendix D.

The aim of the interview was to discuss each teacher's selection of methods used in gathering and recording information on children's progress and reasons for selection.

The researcher also sighted examples of the different methods of recording information from each teacher, in order to check uniformity in use of terms between the classes.

Interview 2. (relating to research questions 3 and 4.)

An example interview schedules was included in Appendix F.

The second interview was based around a common framework but was individualized according to the given school development plan.

The interviews were designed to investigate:

- a. The methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress used by teachers and the reasons why those methods were chosen;**
- b. The possible links between the School Development Plan and the methods used in gathering and recording information on children's progress;**
- c. The use of the recorded information, including those related to the school development plan;**
- d. Concerns of teachers regarding assessment in pre-primary.**

The results from this investigation are presented in the following chapter.

4 RESULTS

The results of the pilot study introduce this chapter followed by the results of the rating scale encompassing all the case studies. Subsequent sections outline the results of each case study. Pseudonyms have been used when referring to the participating teachers. The case studies are presented in five parts: an overview of the class giving a contextual background, methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress used in each class; the reasons why those methods were used and possible influences on this choice; the application of the recorded information, and the concerns teachers had regarding assessment in their classes. Whilst the first part gives an overview of each case study class, the next three parts are organized around the first three research questions, and also incorporate results on the relationship with the SDP. Here data pertaining to the fourth research question is incorporated within each of the other three parts. In the concluding paragraphs the concerns teachers have regarding pre-primary assessment and evaluation are presented.

It needs to be noted, however, that all classes offered full-time programs (by design of the research proposal) and all classes were on-site in the primary school which was not a design criterion.

The researcher selected this format of presentation because it gave a clear picture of each case study, in its entirety. The material is brought together in the analysis and discussion in chapter 5.

4.1 Pilot Study

The pilot study led to certain modifications in the proposed interview schedule, the interview content and to the techniques applied .

1. Three interviews of approximately one hour with each participant were planned at the research proposal stage. As a result of the pilot study, this was modified to two, longer interviews with each participant. In the first interview, designed to examine what methods of gathering and recording children's progress were used, participants in the pilot study were also giving the reasons why they chose those methods. Since it was also found that each of the first two interviews was taking less time than expected (approximately 30 minutes), the researcher amalgamated the two schedules into one interview.
2. The first two interviews used in the pilot study were structured and designed so that questions were asked in the same way and in the same sequence to each participant. As a result of the pilot study the schedule became more flexible, allowing the participants to contribute information as well as answer the questions, and more importantly, allowing a flexibility in the order of questions according to the occurrence of events emerged in the discussion.
3. The pilot study also revealed that the phrasing of three questions possibly left the participant with a feeling of inadequacy. For example, Question 9 read: "What about screening tests, do you have any use for these at all?" It was suggested that this be rephrased to "Do you have a use for screening tests?"

However, in the actual delivery of the interview questions this became: "Do you use screening tests?" In addition questions 6 and 7 of the pilot study read:

Question. 6 Do you assess children's achievement in specific subject areas?"

and Question 7 Do you use any other frameworks to gather information on children's progress?"

Question 7 was rephrased and was based on the answer to question 6, to read:

You seem at home with subject-based assessment is there

another base you work with? (probes given)

or

You don't seem very taken with subject-based assessment,. Is there a base you work with?

4. The use of the word 'portfolio' was questioned during the pilot study as not being part of common teaching jargon. This word was altered in the rating scales to 'collection of children's work' but was retained in the question schedule of the main study. However, the term 'portfolio' was used in conjunction with other terms such as 'collections of children's work', or 'scrapbooks' when the researcher asked the questions.
5. The participants in the pilot study indicated a preference for receiving the rating scale and having time to think about it. Thus in the main study the rating scale (Appendix E) was given to each participant at the conclusion of the first interview for collection at the second interview. The researcher carried a spare copy of the rating scale to each of the second interviews in case the original copies had been misplaced.
- 6 The pilot study also revealed successful use of a tape-recorder. Thus permission to tape-record interviews was sought and given in each of the case studies.

4.2 Rating Scale

Table illustrating the most used methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress where 5 measures the most used.

| CASE: | one | two | three | four | five | six |
|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|-------------|------|-----|
| METHODS OF GATHERING | | | | | | |
| Observation | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Checklists own | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| Checklists acquired | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Checklists published | 2 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Checklists mixed source | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Rating scale | 3 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| Work samples | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Collaboration with staff | 3 | 5 | 5 | when needed | 5 | 5 |
| Collaboration with parents | 3 | 2 | 3 | when needed | 5 | 5 |
| Subject-linked assessment | 4 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| Screening tests | 2 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Use of tape recorder | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Use of video | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Use of Student Outcome Statements | 0 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| METHODS OF RECORDING | | | | | | |
| Anecdotal Records | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| Activity Records | 4 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Daily log | 4 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 5 |
| Use of continuum | 4 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| In the head | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Child profiles | 5 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Charts of progress (domains) | 4 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Time-interval records | 2 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| Sociograms | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

4.3 Case Study 1 “Lynn”

4.3.1 An Overview

The school was a Priority School Program (PSP) school with a total of 149 enrolments of which twenty children were in Education Support and a further nineteen in the pre-primary class. The school had offered a full-time pre-primary program for four years, but the teacher, Lynn, joined the school staff at the beginning of the year (1996). The class was the only pre-primary in the school and was housed in a separate, brick-built facility that used to be the school house, adjacent to the main school and within the school's boundary fences. It had an outside playing area that was not enclosed and the children joined the rest of the school at recess and lunch time play, supervised by the teacher-on-duty. Lynn reported a preference towards using developmental domains as a curriculum framework rather than a subject base, saying:

I've got a program in the domains, like social and emotional - in five domains. I work with the two sorts of things but when I actually write down for programming I prefer the domain-based way.

Lynn had a three-year qualification in Early Childhood Education and had a total of between one and five years teaching experience in early childhood education. This included one in Year 1, some time in a rural integrated program class and one year in pre-primary. She had attended a half day professional development meeting on evaluation and assessment, but reported there was no additional information to the evaluation and assessment she was already doing.

4.3.2 Methods of Gathering and Recording Information on Children's Progress.

Table 2 illustrates the methods of gathering and recording children's progress used by Lynn in areas not covered by the SDP priorities for the current year, compiled from

data collected in the first interview. The table also illustrates the methods stipulated in the SDP for assessment in the priority areas, collated from information gathered in the second interview and from analyzing the SDP.

Table 2 Methods used for gathering and recording information on children's progress.

(Case Study 1)

| <u>GATHERING</u> (Lynn's own choice) | <u>GATHERING</u> (SDP directed) |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| observation | observation |
| collection of children's work | separate collections of children's work for First Steps |
| work books | tests for reading attitude |
| name books | |
| checklists | |
| PMP testing | |
| staff collaboration | |
| parent collaboration | |
| <u>RECORDING</u> (Lynn's own choice) | <u>RECORDING</u> (SDP directed) |
| anecdotal records | anecdotal records |
| checklists | checklists |
| activity records | continua for First Steps |
| rating scales | written records of 'Have a go' awards |
| daily notes | MSB behavioural records |
| sociograms | |
| child profiles | |
| stored "in the head" | |

4.3.2.1 Teacher's selection of methods

In the first interview Lynn reported observation as her main method of gathering information on children's progress, much of which was recorded as anecdotal and activity records and a daily diary of events. Concerning observation Lynn said:

You pick up all sorts of things by observation. . . . In a sense you're looking for their developments in different areas, as well as just observing, like, social and emotional development - behavioural things that could have an effect on their learning - maybe they need extra help. It might be just something little you notice; then it clicks with something else, say, in their work Ongoing observation that you do all the time and which leads to anecdotal records, really.

and

It is hard to just rely on writing samples that they (the children) do because some days they might not write anything and other days they might. You might see them doing writing during free time which you take note of then; so even work collected spontaneously helps a lot.

Other ways of recording that Lynn selected were various checklists and rating scales both of which she preferred to compile herself using a variety of sources covering the developmental domains and subject areas. One of the areas for which she used checklists was her perceptual motor program (PMP) focus which was synonymous with the term PMP tests used elsewhere in the interview regarding assessment of PMP. The type of PMP Lynn used included facets of language and maths so her checklists included language and maths skills.

The anecdotal records and checklists were enhanced by various collections of children's work samples, retained throughout the year for different purposes.

I do things like writing books; they have their own writing book where they have a go at writing - you can see their development that way. And the same way with their drawing. I have a story book where they do stories, and you see their development through their drawings. It's all dated - we do that a couple of times a month. I also do a name sheet which (sic) I don't let them look at anything. . . I might do that once a month to see how they've developed with their letters and the formation of their letters.

and

We've got a scrapbook, too, that's got work I pick out. I choose it on the different areas we cover. I choose the piece beforehand, mostly, but if we do an activity that I wasn't going to put in and I think they've done really well and shown that they've achieved something, then I'll include that as I want the parents to see that. - Scrapbook work is more a skill-based reasoning to show their fine motor skills and their understanding of the activity. That's more for my personal assessment records, than First Steps.

From observation and work samples Lynn reported building master checklists in both developmental domains and the subject areas of literacy, maths, and perceptual motor program (PMP), eventually building up child profiles. Lynn has, on occasions, used a tape recorder and video as tools for gathering information on the children but said she did not make this a regular practice because of the time involved and the difficulty of producing an audible result. Lynn viewed collaboration with her aide and parents as important when gathering information on children's progress. Of collaboration with parents she said:

You do a lot of informal talking with the parent and they'll say how are 'they' [the child] going? I'll say I noticed such and such - so it's informal. Usually that's the only way you see a lot of parents, unless you get an interview which I do if there's a real need for it.

Although she was aware of the suggested student outcome statements (SOS) prepared by the Department of Education, Lynn said she had not used them in her planning or assessment, but was awaiting the reports from the SOS trial 1994-1995. She said: "We're starting to pick up on that [SOS] now, so it will be more in the future, I think, with the outcome statements."

Table 3 shows information taken from the completed rating scales in which teachers indicated on a scale of 0-5 their usage of the various methods of gathering and recording information (Appendix E).

Table 3. Results of Case Study 1 Rating Scale

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| observation | checklists-own | checklists-acquired | checklists-published | use of tape recorder | use of student outcome statements |
| checklist - mixed source | work samples | rating scales | screening tests | | records of student outcomes |
| anecdotal records | subject-linked assessment | collaboration with parents | use of video | | |
| child profiles | activity records | collaboration with staff | time interval records | | |
| | daily log | "in the head" | | | |
| | charts of progress (domains) | sociograms | | | |
| | use of continua | | | | |

Scale descriptor: 5 measures the most used methods.

4.3.2.2 Methods directed by the SDP

In this class, inclusion of the pre-primary was not specifically mentioned in the School Development Plan, (SDP) but Lynn stated

Where the pre-primary can be involved, it is involved.... Some things are not applicable but where they are it is encouraged that they are involved. . . it is more the extent to which they are involved.

There were four decision-making groups in the school and at our meetings - it is a whole staff agreement - whether we do it in the pre-primary (sic).

This year (1996) the three school priorities cited in the SDP were language, social development, and attendance, all of which contained elements relevant to pre-primary level. Indicators of success and details of data collection or monitoring were itemized within the SDP for the priority areas, giving specific guidelines on what to assess and how and when to assess the children's progress.

The literacy priority was divided into three sections requiring special attention: oral

language, writing and reading. Strategies and monitoring procedures were centered around the First Steps Literacy Program and the Olympic Reading Program which was to begin in the following term. Itemized tools used to monitor children's progress were standardized tests, observation and collection of children's work samples. Lynn reported:

The story and writing books are mainly for First Steps and for me - for my personal way of doing it. As well as observation - with little ones it's very hard to just rely on writing samples that they do because some days they might not write anything and other days they might. You might see them doing writing during free time which you take note of then.

Records were to be kept on all children in the area of literacy and were to be entered on the First Steps continua twice each year. In response to these requirements Lynn observed the children, entering literacy skills on checklists and anecdotal records, as well as keeping a separate collection of work samples together with children's writing, story books and name sheets. She used this material to enter the children onto the First Steps continua and gave it to the key teacher in charge. Lynn reported using one commercial test designed to show children's attitude to reading. The test was selected by the staff when planning for this priority.

The second SDP priority area was a cross curricula personal and social development focus in which two main student outcomes were stated:

1. Improve personal confidence and develop a more positive attitude towards 'having a go'.
2. Improve ability to cope with peer group and pressure and bullying issues.

Methods of gathering information on children's progress included teacher observation, a system of awards at class and school levels, circus skills achievement awards, parent and community feed-back, and a teacher survey. Also included was the Management of Student Behaviour (MSB) file to be used by the duty teacher during

recess and lunch breaks to record inappropriate behaviour. Personal and social development was one of the learning areas for which Lynn specifically programmed irrespective of school priorities. However, she involved the pre-primary children in the 'have a go' award system both at class and school levels, monitoring by means of observation and anecdotal records. Lynn said that at this stage there had not been any occasion to use the MSB file although the children interact freely with the rest of the school at recess and lunch times. Other elements of the priority were said to be less applicable to the pre-primary by staff consensus and did not require specific monitoring techniques.

The third SDP priority was for attendance. School attendance was monitored by administrative staff and did not concern pre-primary since attendance was not compulsory at this level. Attendance covered participation where the emphasis was on participation in class and school events rather than on recording attendance at these events. Lynn cited the example of a friendship and flowers activity day:

The older ones looked after the little ones and they all completed nine different activities. We had to get feedback on how it was appropriate rather than checklisting how many were involved. In this school the parents don't seem to take them (children) out to a lot of things so we have special things for the kids.

Thus the class was involved but assessment records were not required. There were further requirements from the SDP relating to the introduction of the Olympic Reading Program but this was not to begin until Term 3 after the date of data collection for this present study.

4.3.2.3 Other assessment requirements

There were three requirements regarding assessment made by the principal. Firstly, the whole school was required to administer a reading attitude test in the first two terms, prior to the commencement of the Olympic Reading Program in Term 3. The tests selected were a whole staff decision. Lynn was required to administer a test in which children viewed pictures of Snoopy displaying various attitudes towards reading, circling the pictures relevant to themselves. Secondly, the Metropolitan Readiness Test was required designed to test children's readiness for entering Year 1. Thirdly, each term, Lynn was required to produce a progress report for parents.

4.3.3 Reasons for Choice of Methods Used.

When asked for reasons for her choice of methods Lynn answered:

Well, I choose ones that I feel comfortable with and that I think are effective. Some things might be more successful than others and I think - well- whatever is more valuable and effective is what should be used, really.

Lynn said she chose observation, linked with anecdotal records because:

I think it is effective. I feel comfortable with it. You pick up all sorts of things through observation. You can put the anecdotes together and see links sometimes, which might have a bearing on an aspect of development or learning.

Her reason for using checklists was as follows:

"It is a quick method of seeing development. It can be applied to activities, whole group or individuals."

In the first interview Lynn glanced across at the question guide and said:

"I see you've got sociograms. I do these as well if I see a problem with social development."

Lynn attributed her choice of methods used to her initial university course.

4.3.4 Application of Gathered Information on Children's Progress

At class level Lynn reported using the information on children's progress predominantly in program planning both on a day to day basis and in the longer term. Lynn planned for the individual child, for groups of children and for the whole class in all aspects of the curriculum. She said:

I use assessment to see where the children are and from there to be able to see what skills and concepts I might need to cover. Mainly it's to benefit the children, to help them developmentally to move on.

In addition she reported using the collections of work in communication with parents informally, at interviews, at Open Day and at the end of each semester.

At school level Lynn reported using the gathered information for the following purposes:

- a. Referral. Records and children's work were used for referral to the school nurse and to the school psychologist throughout the year where the need arose, particularly in regards to possible speech problems.
- b. Continuity into Year 1. At the end of each semester the checklists relating to the First Steps program and a set of work samples were used to place children on the First Steps continua. The continua were then passed onto the next teacher at the end of the year so that each child's development in literacy could be monitored continually through school. Lynn stated:

It's developmental so that the next teacher can look in there and see what skills they have displayed previously and where they are at. The continuum is used throughout the school.

In addition Lynn produced a master sheet summarizing the various checklists compiled throughout the year which were passed to the Year 1 teacher.

- c. **School development.** The First Steps program continua were also passed to the key teacher for analysis and then to the School Development Group for assessment of the success of the Priority and for future planning in regard to literacy. Lynn reported:

As a staff we have to show or be aware of the indicators of success to be able to understand whether the children are actually developing effective language skills. They're the actual points we have to cover to let us know we have achieved that priority. . . Although we're supposed to get a whole picture and look at all the indicators we have to cover the ones that are appropriate to our area.

In addition, throughout the year behavioural notes made in the MSB file, if any, would be examined by the key teacher and a behaviour modification program would be designed through staff collaboration. At the end of the year the notes would be collated by the relevant key teacher and used to monitor the success or otherwise of the Priority. This would then be used for further school planning. (At the time of data collection no children from the pre-primary class had been reported in the MSB book). Both these sets of information were used, therefore, in school planning and accountability.

- d. **School level planning** apart from the SDP areas. The checklists made in the perceptual motor program were used by the key teacher in future planning at school level.
- e. **Examination by the principal.** Lynn also stated that assessment records, work samples in particular, were examined by the principal from time to time with the purpose of seeing the skills covered, individual performance, and progress made.
- f. **Reporting.** The format and the content of the report was the teacher's decision and Lynn chose to include certain skills which were basic to her program which were common to each term's report outline with some additional skills in each consecutive term. She said: "The principal wanted the parents to see what the child

had achieved each term.”

Recipients of each report were the child’s parents, the principal, who read it and then filed it in school records, and the year 1 teacher for “continuity purposes”.

4.3.5 Teacher Concerns Regarding Pre-primary Assessment and Evaluation

Lynn was concerned that there needed to be a clear purpose to the information required, particularly at school level, and that the purpose be fulfilled. She also expressed a concern that there may be too much information required when she said:

I think you can do too much assessment with the kids, especially the little ones. I mean you’ve got to be efficient in the way you gain it or it’s just a piece of paper for the sake of doing it. Is it going to benefit you and what’s it going to be used for? Is it really going to be looked at, for instance, in Year 1?

Lynn did, however, state that :

In this school all the assessments we’ve done like the attitude surveys, the whole school things have been used because they’re submitted and collated and than we discuss them as a part of the SDP to see what needs to be planned for the future.

4.4 Case study 2 “Sue”

4.4.1 An Overview

The school was a PSP school with approximately 300 children enrolled, of whom 26 were enrolled in the pre-primary class, one of the pre-primary children being a child with special needs. The school had offered a full-time pre-primary program in the case-study class for five years, whereas the second pre-primary class had only been offering a full-time program for two years. However, if the patterns of previous years continue, many of these children would not be entering Year 1 at this school. Firstly, adjoining schools offered sessional pre-primary programs rather than full-time causing parents who preferred full-time pre-primary to select this school for the pre-primary year. Secondly, there was a high level of mobility within the population. Sue’s class was accommodated in a modified classroom situated in the junior cluster but it had its own enclosed yard. However, the children were integrated fully with the rest of the school at lunch-time play in term 4. Sue had been in that class for two years, and reported a preference for using developmental domains as a curriculum framework. She said: “The objectives I have are in domains.”

Sue had a Bachelor of Arts (Ed.) which she had converted to a Bachelor of Education degree in Early Childhood Education. She had taught a Year 5 class for between one and five years and pre-primary classes for between five and ten years and had been at this school for two years. She had not attended professional development in the area of assessing children’s progress.

4.4.2 Methods of Gathering and Recording Information on Children's Progress

Table 4 sets out the methods selected by Sue in areas not covered by the SDP priorities for the current year. It also sets out methods stipulated in the SDP for assessment of the priority areas, collated from the second interview and the SDP

Table 4 Methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress. (Case Study 2)

| <u>GATHERING</u> (Sue's own methods)'s | <u>GATHERING</u> (SDP directed) |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| observation | observation |
| collections of children's work | collection of children's work for First Steps |
| checklists | checklists |
| parent collaboration | |
| staff collaboration | |
| audio-taping | |
| <u>RECORDING</u> (Sue's own choice) | <u>RECORDING</u> (SDP directed) |
| anecdotal notes (on some children) | anecdotal notes |
| checklists | checklists for First Steps |
| running records | |
| rating scales | |

4.4.2.1 Teacher's selection of methods

Sue reported that observation was her main method of gathering information on the children's progress. She understood observation to mean a quest - "Looking at; asking questions; asking "why did he do it this way?" Everything, all the time in the

classroom", and that she collected work samples throughout the year both as a regular means of communicating with parents and as a means of gathering and recording children's progress. Regarding this she said:

The way we record it (observation), tho', is a bit different. I have a book which goes back to the parents about once a week - on Tuesdays; they keep it at home till the following Monday and then it comes back and there's a sample of their work in - but weekly.

At this point Sue and researcher were looking at some of the work books.

Here's a patterning activity - and the one that couldn't pattern-well-it's self-evident. It's dated. Some sewing ones . . . that one was a counting one cutting one on the fold. They all relate to a song or a rhyme and the words go home to the parent.

She also reported using collaboration with other staff, particularly her aide, and with parents in collecting information on children's progress. She also described her use of checklists:

If I'm doing something that week I'll have a couple of objectives for the week and I checklist according to that checklist. It's how I've done it, not like "I've done that". It might be a cutting skill or a social courtesy.

Sue said she used audio-taping on occasions as a method of gathering and recording information, although she said it was difficult to obtain audible results. She described how she would sometimes leave a tape recorder on in a selected area, to hear the children when they thought she wasn't around. However, she said her main methods of recording the information incorporated checklists, rating scales, running records, and anecdotal records but she reported that she only wrote anecdotal records on some children, on a 'needs basis'. Of anecdotal records she said:

It's not every child; just the children I think need it-and I will jot down anecdotal records that are basic. Here (refers to her book) you see a double page per child and sometimes you might need more than that and sometimes you might not pop anything in - just depending. That's a needs basis and they all usually end up with something in there. about behaviour, emotional, physical, academic progress. . .

Sue also mentioned using running records on a needs basis. She said:

I might do, say, a twenty minute time block - stand back and record everything that they do. Another time I might see what he's doing every five minutes. Like' I've got a child at the moment that spends the time lying on the floor bothering other children and not doing anything constructive., so I did every 5 minutes - something I can take to the Psyche and show what's going on.

Table 5 illustrates information derived from the completed rating scale in which teachers indicated their usage of various methods of gathering and recording information.

Table 5 Results of Case Study 2 Rating Scales

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
|------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| observation | | | collaboration with parents | use of tape recorder | acquired checklists |
| own checklists | | | | use of SOS | mixed source checklists |
| published checklists | | | | use of continuum | subject linked assessment |
| rating scale | | | | child profiles | use of video |
| work samples | | | | time interval records | activity records |
| collaboration with staff | | | | | daily log |
| screening test | | | | | sociograms |
| anecdotal records | | | | | |
| "in the head" | | | | | |
| charts of progress (domains) | | | | | |

Scale Descriptor: 5 measures the methods most used

4.4.2.2 Methods directed by the SDP

The pre-primary class was not specifically mentioned as being included in the School Development Plan. This year (1996) there were two main priorities in mathematics and oral language. The mathematics was focused more on the upper levels of the primary school which meant that Sue was not required to follow the material in the SDP where maths was concerned. The oral language priority incorporated the First Steps material in oral language, but by staff collaborative decision the pre-primary teachers were required to observe the children's progress in oral language, to record it on checklists and anecdotal notes and to keep samples of children's work. However, staff conceded to Sue's request not to place the children on the continua at this level. The SDP also specified the use of pre- and post-testing of children in literacy, but again staff omitted the pre-primary from these tests. The pre-primary classes were, however, fully involved in the other oral language strategies incorporated into the SDP such as running assemblies and participation in W.A. Week, which were activities in which children were encouraged to participate but were not to be assessed.

Sue reported that although the pre-primary classes were not specifically mentioned in the SDP they were involved in those priorities where applicable but in a modified way agreed to by the planning group. Sue was able to choose her own methods of assessing children's progress within the context of the SDP.

4.4.2.3 Other assessment requirements.

In this class a School Evaluation Test, comprising a master checklist of skills achieved particularly in maths and literacy, was required by the principal at the end of the pre-primary year. The test allowed for the informal methods already outlined to be used.

4.4.3 Reasons for Choice of Methods Used

Sue reported that she programmed according to a developmental domain framework. This was “because of the way children learn - and now they’re actually seeing more and more through First Steps and programs like that and it’s going into Year 1 so it’s pushing developmental learning - eventually we might get there.”

She emphasized the use of informal methods throughout the two interviews:

It is most suited to the environment; clearer method of seeing and understanding. An informal environment needs use of informal methods. For example, a child may not be able to answer a question but displays an understanding in his or her play.

As stated previously one of these informal methods was observation. Sue said she used that because:

It’s most suited to the environment we’re in and you’re also able to get a clear idea of whether a child’s got an understanding. You can ask a child, they may not be able to answer the question but in their play they might be displaying the understanding.

Her reasons for using checklists are as follows:

It is easy to move through the year checking development. It is an easy method and I’m familiar with it. It is easy to interpret . . . so I can check information from one part of the year to another. Has the child actually moved along? . . . I can look down and notice a lot of children haven’t done this so I’ll do heaps of activities on it. Other times a small group are having problems. It’s straight in front of you.

She attributed her choice of methods used to her teaching practices whilst at university.

4.4.4 Application of Gathered Information on Children’s Progress

At class level, Sue reported using the information on children’s progress for her programming in general and in particular, to see “where the children were at”, to see which children needed more help or needed building up. She also used the information for parent communication throughout the year. She described how she sent one set of

work samples home every week with a new sample added each week, in which she sometimes made a comment explaining the skill involved and the words of a poem or song introduced that week. Sue also explained that this set of work samples was in itself both a teaching and assessment practice in that it encouraged children's pride in their work and responsibility to look after it and return it next day. The information was also sometimes used during a parent interview.

At school level the gathered information on children's progress was used in the following ways:

- a. **School and teacher accountability.** Each teacher was required to show the assessment records at a meeting with the principal each semester. Each was also required to fill in a questionnaire to say how they were fulfilling the school development plan. The latter, plus a report from the principal, was then made available to the superintendent for accountability purposes.
- b. **Referral purposes.** Sue stated that she was well aware of the possible referral use of her records since she had on previous occasions been asked to provide information on a child's progress for Princess Margaret Hospital and on another occasion for legal purposes concerning a particular child. However, Sue reported that although these types of incidents arose infrequently, records were needed for referral on things such as speech, language, hearing and behaviour, to the school nurse and the school psychologist.
- c. **Continuity.** A master-checklist on each child and the records from the school entry evaluation were filed in school records and were given to the Year 1 but no formal reports for parents were required. Sue stated that none of the information recorded on children's progress was used directly by the School Development Planning Group.

4.4.5 Teacher Concerns Regarding Pre-primary Assessment and Evaluation

Sue was concerned about assessment being pushed into subject areas away from the developmental domains. She was also concerned about the trend towards formal, written, reporting to parents, preferring to report to parents in an interview situation.

4.5 Case Study 3 “Katie”

4.5.1 An Overview

The school is an Early Childhood Unit with approximately 250 children enrolled from pre-primary to year 2. The class was one of two pre-primary classes and has offered a full-time program for four years. It was accommodated in the main school building, in one half of an open area, the other half housing a Year 1 class. It had an adjacent ‘wet’ area entered through a door, and children had to leave the class to go to the school toilets. There was an enclosed outside play area adjoining the other pre-primary class, but children from all grades, including the case study class, were permitted to play there at recess and lunch. Pre-primary children were fully integrated at recess and lunch with the rest of the school. Katie had been at the school since the beginning of the year. She reported a preference for the use of developmental domains in planning her curriculum.

Katie had a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education and a Graduate Diploma of Early Childhood Education. She taught a Year 5 class and a pre-primary class for between one and five years, and four year old pre-school for seven years, previous to her appointment to this school. She attended a half day professional development on evaluation. She reported that it did not offer any new methods; neither did it influence her choice of methods of gathering or recording information on children’s progress. However, Katie reported that she had been involved in in-school professional development on programs such as ‘Let’s Decode’, and ‘Friendly Kids, Friendly Classrooms’, which included assessment techniques. Katie said most of these included testing methods as well as observation and checklists.

4.5.2 Methods of Gathering and Recording Information on Children's Progress

Table 6 illustrates the methods used by Katie in areas not covered by the SDP priorities for the current year, compiled from data collected in the first interview. It further illustrates the methods stipulated in the SDP for assessment in the priority areas, collated from the second interview and the SDP.

Table 6 Methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress (Case Study 3)

| <u>GATHERING</u> (Katie's own methods) | <u>GATHERING</u> (SDP directed methods) |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| observation | observation |
| checklists | checklists |
| collections of children's work | collections of children's work for First Steps |
| staff collaboration | diagnostic testing (social skills) |
| parent collaboration | one-to-one testing (technology, phonetic awareness, maths). |
| use of tape recorder | TOLD test |
| other published tests | Let's Decode test |
| <u>RECORDING</u> (Katie's own methods) | <u>RECORDING</u> (SDP directed methods) |
| anecdotal notes (on each child) | anecdotal notes |
| master checklists | master checklists (all priorities) |
| rating scales | test results on charts |
| classroom diary | continua (four elements of First Steps) |
| test records | maths journal |
| use of camera | |

4.5.2.1 Teacher's selection of methods

Katie described how she converted her observations into written records:

I've got a couple of charts, one in the cupboard, here, and one in the aide's store-room on the back of the door so they're not in view of where parents see them, and the little things that happen that we need to take note of; an interest that has come up that we can follow up for planning; a child that's having a particular problem we've noticed. Just little things - we note down so that on Friday we have a look at that and can put it in context.....then we go from that to these sheets, and I have one for every child. It's dated and recorded on here so that everything pertaining to that particular child is all here and from there it goes to wherever it's meant, whether its programming, planning, parent follow-up - whatever.

Regarding one of the collections of children's work Katie said:

We keep work samples all the way through. The children have a work book that work samples are sent home in the end of every term. Some are whole group activity things and some are individual things. I plan an activity around a skill and that goes into the work book. I comment on them - in information bubbles - what the activity was about not generally how the child went.

The tests which Katie would normally choose to use listed included the Test of Language Development (TOLD) test and Blank and Bohem tests.

Katie emphasized the importance of collaboration with her aide and with the parents in gathering information on children's progress. She also reported successful use of a tape recorder. Teacher records showed anecdotal notes on every child, master checklists for domains and subject areas, some of which were expressed as rating scales. Katie spoke about her checklists and described how she used a checklist in relation to a master checklist:

I have checklists for everything - listening, writing and reading, maths, fine and gross motor skills, social and emotional, including one on the Friendly Kids program, technology, music, art - all the areas in the SDP...I do a list, for instance, on colours. So I check them all off, highlight the children who need help and then the children that know their colours (sic). I tick them off on the master list.

She reported that she used her own checklists for her own assessment and for some of the SDP areas 'on maintenance' but also used published checklists or checklists compiled from published program guidelines such as First Steps. Katie reported using a classroom diary, test records and a camera as additional means of recording information.

Table 7 illustrates information taken from the completed rating scales in which teachers indicated on a scale of 0-5 their usage of the various methods of gathering and recording information on the children's progress.

Table 7 Results of usage from the rating scales. (Case study 3)

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---|---------------------|
| observation | screening tests | rating scales | use of tape recorder (2) | | use of video |
| own checklist | sociograms | collaboration with parents | | | acquired checklists |
| published checklists | | "in the head" | | | |
| mixed source checklists | | | | | |
| work samples | | | | | |
| collaboration with staff | | | | | |
| subject linked assessment | | | | | |
| anecdotal notes | | | | | |
| student outcome statement | | | | | |
| activity records | | | | | |
| daily log | | | | | |
| use of continua | | | | | |
| child profiles | | | | | |
| chart of progress, domains | | | | | |
| time-interval records | | | | | |
| student outcome records | | | | | |

Scale descriptor: 5 represents the most-used methods.

4.5.2.2 Methods directed by the SDP

In this case the School Development Plan was considered applicable to all classes from pre-primary to Year 2. Katie said:

We're told at the beginning everything that's expected, so it's set up for every area. It's a very specific document and really you can't get wrong with it because everything's all spelt out and you usually get a budget allocation and a PD allocation

There were three main priorities for 1996, these being language, including writing and oral language, social skills and technology. For each area expected student outcomes were stipulated. Also listed in the Plan were the methods of data collection to be used and the dates by which these were to be completed. However, of the proposed Student Outcome Statements issued by the Department of Education, W.A. Katie said:

Who knows what they're talking about. It's written up like a legal document. You have to read it ten times to figure out what they're saying. - but I haven't had any in-service on it.

SDP Priority 1 - language, was monitored through teacher observation, checklists and collection of children's work leading to the placement of students on the First Steps continua for collection twice each year. In addition the pre-primary was involved in the oral program 'Let's Decode', in which the children were tested on a one-to-one basis at the beginning and end of the year by a member of the Let's Decode program evaluation team, rather than by school staff, using the TOLD test. The team envisaged that these children would be assessed in the same manner in Year one to note progression and that the pre-primary children in the 1997 intake would also undertake the same program, with the same testing procedures.

SDP Priority 2 - social skills, incorporated the use of a pro-social skills program, "Friendly Kids, Friendly Classrooms." The School Development Plan indicated that

teachers were to measure each child's social acceptance and the social climate of the classroom. This was done by administering the published diagnostic tests "Friendly Kids" in terms 1 and 3. The test must be administered by each teacher. In addition to the "Friendly Kids" tests Katie kept checklists and anecdotal records on elements relating to social skills.

SDP Priority 3 - technology. There were several performance indicators all of which were said to be relevant to all the year levels. Monitoring requirements consisted of "observation of children's interest, knowledge and use of equipment on the tinkering table and use of teachers' checklists to monitor the children's progress on Technology." In addition there was a design segment in technology twice per year for each class, in which the teacher chose a topic in which the children had to design, make and appraise an item selecting their own materials from a given collection. The teacher then monitored each child in relation to their plan, their selection of materials, their construction and their self-evaluation. Katie described the monitoring process:

...one by one, and this is what people don't realize, we have to evaluate every child one by one; look at their plan, look at what they've come up with, talk to them about their achievement and get their self-evaluation on whether they used the things they thought they would use, whether it came out the way they thought it would. Are they happy with the end result?

Katie successfully requested to omit the first of these design segments. The pre-primary teacher assessed the majority of the technology by observational methods and anecdotal records. She said:

To me, Technology is a very hard one to come to terms with what it really is. But from what I've read and what I've seen in the book shops and things like that - you can put anything in there; using a pencil, child's pencil grip, use of playground equipment, use of scissors - all come into technology as well.

In addition to the main priorities there were several other SDP priorities 'on

maintenance'. In other words priorities from previous years were still being monitored. The first of these was mathematics which still had a high level of focus. Teachers were required to monitor specific elements, using checklists, observation of activities and discussions together with the use of a classroom maths journal/diary. Katie had four main checklists each referring to a different strand from which she built a master sheet for reporting to the school development planning team. She also kept her classroom journal.

Other maintenance priorities were physical education, health education, art, music, science, and social studies, all of which still had detailed outcomes or performance indicators which were used as a basis for program planning and acted as a guideline on what to assess. There were also specified monitoring techniques such as teacher records, checklists, observation and in one instance, collections of work.

4.5.2.3 Other assessment requirements

In this class a screening test was required by the Year 1 teacher prior to the end of the pre-primary year, although the methods used in gathering the information were left to the teacher's discretion. In discussing screening tests Katie said:

I'm using an oral language screening test - the small one in 'Let's Decode', and I'm particularly keen on the 'Blank' and also on maths concepts.

4.5.3 Reasons for choice of method

Katie described her reasons for trying to record everything she could:

Mainly because I'm temporary and I've got used to the fact that quite often I'm only in a place for a term so if I don't keep extensive notes then at the end of the term I'm madly trying to put on paper for the teacher coming back - a lot of people carry things in their head but because I know I'm not going to be there I've just got to record it.

Katie preferred to use observation skills together with checklists and collecting of work samples in gathering and recording information on children's progress. She stated:

They are easier, they are convenient and I'm used to them. Checklists can be modified to suit the given school situation and information from them can be transferred easily to master checklists.

In addition to these Katie kept anecdotal records on every child, but stated she did not do as many now as she used to because:

it's just finding the time to record all those sorts of things for every child - you just can't. It's basically time - and there's so much more to add now we've got another subject - technology and pro-social skills.

Katie emphasised the importance of collaboration with her aide and with parents in gathering information.

4.5.4 Application of the Gathered Information on Children's Progress

Katie reported using the gathered information on children's progress for program planning for individuals, groups, and the whole class. She said:

Mainly to see if they're (children) ready to move onto the next step. If they haven't grasped a bit then we'll go on with it; or group the children - I've got a group that need extra cutting, and another little group that don't know their colours.

She viewed this as vital not only to her curriculum planning for the children but also for her personal accountability. Katie also used the information, particularly children's work samples, in parent communication throughout the year, through casual conversations and pre-appointed interviews.

Katie described how the records kept to satisfy the SDP requirements were collated by the various key teachers. They were used in the following ways:

- a. To monitor the success or otherwise of the priorities.
- b. To plan priorities for the following year.
- c. To monitor children's progress.

- d. To plan specialist staffing areas in following year.
- e. To plan placing of children in following year eg. split classes, multi-age grouping (MAG) classes, straight classes.
- f. Referral to support classes or programs. Information was used for referral purposes where necessary, particularly for speech problems and for learning difficulties. Two children had been referred to occupational therapy.
- g. Evaluation of the programs which formed part of the priority strategies. Katie reported on the monitoring of the Friendly Kids program:

We have a staff meeting - to check everything is being done and that everyone is aware of what is to be carried out (whispered - they check up on us). I think we're deciding among ourselves - whether the program is meeting our needs; whether it's giving us enough ideas, enough support and enough information to make it viable.

- h. Continuity. The following material was to be presented to the Year 1 teacher for these purposes:

First Steps continua and work samples.
Social Skills developmental records.
School entry tests.
Let's Decode records.
Master checklists compiled from all other subject areas and developmental domains.

- i. Accountability. For personal accountability the teacher had an accountability meeting each term with the principal in which the records on children's progress played a major part. At school level the records produced for the SDP requirements fulfilled accountability. Katie said: "It's becoming more and more the big thing and I think it's going further. The principal's off today at a big thing on accountability."
- j. Reporting. A formal report to parents was required each semester, the format having been selected by the school development group in 1995. It included a rating scale and covered the areas of social skills, language and maths. The format was the same

for each of the year levels in the school unit.

4.5.5 Concerns Regarding Pre-primary Assessment and Evaluation

Katie expressed her concern regarding issues arising from professional development on “Stranger Danger Awareness”. She stated that in issues related to stranger danger, or abuse (which was part of the PD) she was not permitted to discuss observations with her aide but was required to report directly to the principal. This directive also applied to her aide. Katie was concerned because she valued collaboration with her aide in assessing and planning but in this area she was no longer allowed to do so. She said:

I find this extremely difficult as we work as a team and I can't be everywhere at once and neither can she. We need to be able to sit back and compare notes. I understand the need for confidentiality, but I think this is a poor situation.

Katie was also concerned about the amounts of assessment required and if they were really used effectively at school level. In both the interviews, Katie described how she had frequently been moved from school to school since changing from a community-based four-year old centre to school-based early childhood classes. She found this unsettling and she was continually required to “do things a different way.”

4.6 Case Study 4 “Jo”

4.6.1 An Overview

The school enrolled approximately 200 students, of whom twenty one attended the one pre-primary class. The class was accommodated in a modified class room next to the Year 1 class, but had its own enclosed outside area. It had offered a full-time program for five years and Jo had taught in the class for those five years. Although the children had a separate outside area, they were integrated with the rest of the school for lunch-time play in fourth term. Jo expressed a strong preference for planning the curriculum in developmental domains, in saying: “Their development is very important to me.”

Jo had a Bachelor of Arts degree (Education) with a Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education. She taught Community Pre-school (children turning 5) for eight years and pre-primary for five years. She had not been involved in professional development on assessment or evaluation.

4.6.2 Methods of Gathering and Recording Information on Children’s Progress

Table 8 illustrates the methods used by Jo in areas not covered by the SDP priorities for the current year, compiled from data collected at the first interview. It also illustrates the methods stipulated in the SDP for assessment in the priority areas, collated from information from the second interview.

Table 8 Methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress. (Case study 4)

| <u>GATHERING</u> (Jo's own methods) | <u>GATHERING</u> (SDP directed methods) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| observation | observation |
| collection of children's work | work samples for First Steps |
| checklists | checklists |
| collaboration with staff | tests for PMP |
| collaboration with parents | |
| <u>RECORDING</u> (Jo's own methods) | <u>RECORDING</u> (SDP directed methods) |
| anecdotal notes (needs basis) | master checklists |
| checklists | continua for First Steps |
| daily work pad | behavioural chart |
| written comments on work samples | records of awards |

4.6.2.1 Teacher's selection of methods.

Jo linked observation with anecdotal notes and then said:

especially in the pre-primary situation; you can't afford not to. I might look for children's ability to interact in a group, how they get on with their peers; then I might set up an activity and make sure I step back or my aide steps in when I'm observing I don't interact, just divorce myself from the situation, so there's no way I can influence what's happening.

In regard to children's work collections Jo said:

I collect them in a book. I have a series of things I want to look at that I collect each year, and it's definitely not the best - it's what's presented at the time; like if you're doing cutting that's going in the book it's the cutting they do on that day, not the best cutting that I've seen. It may be a fault as children, like adults, don't do their best every day.

In the first interview Jo emphasized the importance of verbal interaction both in her

program and in her assessment, which she recorded as anecdotal notes or "in the head" information. Other anecdotal records were only made on a "needs basis", rather than on every child.

Table 9 illustrates information taken from the completed rating scales in which teachers indicated on a scale of 0-5 their usage of their various methods of gathering and recording children's progress.

Table 9 Results of usage from the class 4 rating scale.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| observation | own checklists | student outcome statements | use of continua | screening tests | all other checklists |
| work samples | anecdotal records | daily log | child profiles | student outcome records | rating scales |
| | "in the head" | | | | tape recorder |
| | | | | | video |
| | | | | | activity records |
| | | | | | charts of progress (domains) |
| | | | | | sociograms |

Scale descriptor: 5 represents the methods most used.

N.B. Jo entered the words "when needed" beside the collaboration with staff and parents column. (Rating Scale Results)

4.6.2.2 Methods directed by the SDP

In this school the School Development Group allowed the pre-primary teacher to decide to what extent she participated in the SDP priorities. The class levels to be included in the priorities were stipulated in the SDP with the exception of the pre-

primary, which was not mentioned.

The SDP priority in English focused on writing and stipulated the use of First Steps material but Jo reported that she was not required to participate. However, Jo also stated that oral language was still being monitored at SDP level and that since she put emphasis on speaking and listening in all areas of her program she participated in this priority. As part of an ongoing oral language program she used observation, checklists and children's work samples, placing the children on the "First Steps" oral language continuum for submission to the planning team. However, she described some of the difficulties involved in assessing for First Steps:

You're supposed to be collecting work specifically for "First Steps" - written samples. It's tricky in the pre-primary - you can't say 'write something for me' it's got to be off their own bat; so you've got to collect pieces up and hope they've put their names on it. . . the children have got to be seen doing this particular thing three times - all casually, all their own - that's the problem.

The SDP priorities in mathematics and science applied only to Years 3 - 7; music and health to Years 2, 4 and 6; and physical education specified Years 1 - 7. The latter was brought in as a result of fitness testing from years 1-7. The pre-primary was incorporated into some of the activities, the main one being the integrated sessions using a Perceptual Motor Program (PMP). The children's progress was tested and recorded on checklists from the pre-packaged program before being given to the coordinator for school planning. At the end of the year each student in Years 1-7 would be tested again for fitness levels. The pre-primary children would not be tested, because the pre-primary class was not formally included in the priority.

The SDP priority on self-esteem and justice did not formally include the pre-primary class, although development of self-esteem was very much part of Jo's program. The last priority on managing student behaviour included the pre-primary to

the extent that children were included in the positive reward system itemized in the MSB. For example, Jo had a classroom chart similar to those in other classes, on which she visually recorded children's good behaviour. When a child reached a given number of appropriately coloured stickers s/he gained an award or badge in school assembly, or was congratulated by a key teacher from the rest of the primary school. The negative behaviour was dealt with in the class by the pre-primary teacher rather than on a school level.

4.6.2.3 Other assessment requirements

In this case a screening test was required by the Principal towards the end of the pre-primary year for use by the Year 1 teacher. The requirements set out the information to be provided rather than specifying methods to be used. Jo fulfilled this requirement by providing a master checklist covering the information.

4.6.3 Reasons for choice of method

In talking about the methods which she used to gather and record information on children's progress Jo gave reasons for her preferences. She used observation because "It is to get a feel for the child. To see him in different situations", whilst of checklists she said: "They show specifically 'Yes, he can' or 'No, he can't, Again for specific skills - fine motor, counting, that type of thing - it's cut and dried." In comparison, she explained the reason for collecting work samples

They are good indicators of what the child is capable of doing, where a checklist is a bit too - it is a tick and a cross. Work samples give a clearer indication of what the child can do.

4.6.4 Application of the Gathered Information on Children's Progress

Jo reported that she mainly used her collected information in program planning

both for the class and for the individual needs. She said it was to “find out where the children are at and where we can take them.” Some of the records, particularly the work samples, were used for communicating with parents at interviews where needed.

At school level Jo reported that assessment records were not formally required of the pre-primary where the school development planning group was concerned. They were not analyzed in the Management Information System (MIS) However, they were used for the following purposes:

- a. Continuity. The “First Steps” continua and the perceptual motor program records were requested for school records and for Year 1. Also required for this purpose were a master checklist and an overall anecdotal note on each child. Jo added “there was a lot of verbal communication as well.”
- b. Referral. Jo stated that the information was sometimes used for referral purposes, and for positive reinforcement of behavior through the weekly newsletter.
- c. Reporting. Progress reports to parents were not required, but an overall written report summarizing the records given to the Year 1 teacher for each child was required by the principal for his own records at the conclusion of the year.
- d. Accountability. The need for personal accountability was reported but of school level accountability Jo said: “There’s no emphasis on that because there are no specific requirements made.”

4.6.5 Teacher Concerns Regarding Pre-primary Assessment and Evaluation

Jo was concerned that

things are being pushed down from the upper primary.; that we are losing sight of the child, focusing too much on the ‘Can he or can’t he’ aspect.” . . . Some pre-primaries are little bit too close to grade 1 - they should come down to pre-primary. All the ‘stuff’ I’ve read and all the meetings I’ve been to, especially at a local university; everybody’s saying that grades 1 and 2

should be less formalized and yet all the teachers are coming up with more work.

Jo also expressed concern about the amount of movement of pre-primary teachers amongst schools at the end of each year.

4.7 Case study 5 “Angela”

4.7.1 An Overview

The school of approximately 195 students ceased to be a Priority school in 1995. The single pre-primary class had 26 children enrolled. It was accommodated in a modified classroom at the end of a line of classrooms on one side of a playground quadrangle, but had its own enclosed outside playground area at the back of the classroom. 1996 was the first year of the full-time program and the first year that Angela had been on the staff of the school. She expressed a strong preference for using developmental domains as a framework for her planning.

Angela had a three year teaching qualification in Early Childhood from the United Kingdom and had a total of 21 years teaching experience in the lower grades of the primary school in Britain. She had also taught pre-primary classes for six years in Western Australia. Angela had attended a one day professional development session in which she asserted that she was encouraged in her methods of gathering and recording information although according to her, no new material had been introduced.

4.7.2 Methods of Gathering and Recording Information on Children’s Progress

Table 10 illustrates the methods used by the teacher in areas not covered by the SDP priorities for the current year, compiled from data collected in the first interview. It also illustrates the methods stipulated in the SDP for assessment in the priority areas collated from the second interview and from the SDP.

Table 10 Methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress. (Case study 5)

| <u>GATHERING</u> (Angela's own methods) | <u>GATHERING</u> (SDP directed methods.) |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| observation | nothing stipulated for pre-primary |
| checklists | |
| collections of children's work | |
| collaboration with staff | |
| collaboration with parents | |
| <u>RECORDING</u> (Angela's own methods) | <u>RECORDING</u> (SDP directed methods) |
| anecdotal notes(needs basis) | |
| daily log | |
| child profiles | |
| comments on work samples | |
| rating scales | |
| "in the head" | |

4.7.2. 1 Teacher's selection of methods

Angela reported using observation with her own checklists and collections of children's work. She emphasized the importance of collaboration with her aide in gathering and recording information on children's progress:

Well, I'm observing continually. . . . I think it's informal, anecdotal, chatting with your aide. . . I observe things like little social groups, peer groups as well as listening skills, social skills, and 'stuff' like that. I watch the children and make sure I talk to each child because of the ones who won't come and volunteer information. . . then there's background things like - this particular child had come with brother and sister and were late coming across the oval. She's so stubborn they left her but very often

someone will come and tell you she's there; another mum comes and pushes her through the door. You need to observe what's happening to the child before designing a program.

Angela said she valued informal collaboration with the parents in helping her to understand the children in her care:

You learn a lot about the child from informal chatting with the parents. A lot of the kids here - don't have breakfast before they come, or they may have had a fight with their mum, or there's been an access night.

She recorded onto checklists and rating scales, most of which she compiled herself with a direct link with her program. She also used anecdotal notes but only where there might be "a problem", or "something outstanding" or of "particular interest" to note. Angela also kept samples of children's work, emphasized the importance of information carried "in the head" in planning and in the organization of day to day activities.

In regard to recording information on children's progress Angela said:

I suppose work samples throughout the year will be the more formal type - cutting samples, drawing samples; not necessarily the best work. The things we have on the walls will go into the folder - writing, art, with stories or descriptions - everything is dated. From that I think you can make an assessment on how that child is progressing.

Table 11 illustrates information taken from the completed rating scale on which teachers indicated on a scale of 0-5 their usage of the methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress.

Table 11 Results of the class 5 rating scale

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
|----------------------|---|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| observation | | rating scales | use of video | other checklists | subject-linked |
| own checklists | | time interval records | use of continua | screening tests | activity records |
| work samples | | | child profiles | tape recorder | daily log |
| staff collaboration | | | | student outcome statements | charts of progress |
| parent collaboration | | | | | sociograms |
| anecdotal records | | | | | records of student outcomes |
| "in the head" | | | | | |

Scale descriptor: 5 represents the most used methods.

4.7.2.2 Methods directed by the SDP

The SDP made little mention of year levels in regard to the priority areas; and then only targeting the upper grades and made no mention of the pre-primary level. The MIS from the previous year did not include data regarding the pre-primary. Angela reported that the pre-primary was not formally included in the SDP priorities and she was not required to submit assessment records in this regard. However, she explained how she worked on the priority areas using her own assessment.

There were five priorities listed in the SDP for this school. The first two were on elements of student support, one of which targeted the upper grades of the primary school, whilst the other targeted more on parents supporting their children. The latter was relevant to parents of pre-primary children but was not applicable to this research.

The third priority was mathematics which targeted the upper grades. The fourth priority on personal responsibility did not formally include the pre-primary but Angela was using the SDP Outcome Statements in her own program. She used observation to monitor children's progress in this area, making mental note of some of it and checklisting other elements. The information was not required at school level.

The last priority was technology and enterprise. The pre-primary participated but assessment was not required at school level. For instance, each class was asked to focus on a topic, designing and making items to do with that topic culminating in a display in the classrooms. At pre-primary level this involved group activity focusing on the 'doing of it' rather than the finished product. Angela observed elements such as children's participation, leadership roles and problem solving abilities, making both mental and anecdotal notes throughout the activity. Assessment was not required at school level.

The skills specified in the sixth priority - library, were not applicable to pre-primary, in that the children were expected to be able to use the automated library system, access the 'search screen' and the CD ROM facility and to be able to find things like a road directory, atlas etc. However, Angela viewed her work with the children in the library as preparing for the required skills in the upper levels. She said that this was where the patterns and foundations were laid. Assessment for the SDP was not required.

4.7.2.3 Other assessment requirements

Although there were no formal assessment requirements for the pre-primary in the SDP, a school evaluation test was required at the end of the year by the principal, but methods used were at the discretion of the teacher. At the time of the research nothing had been given to Angela regarding content of the evaluation test.

4.7.3 Reasons for Choice of Method

Angela said she was happier working in developmental domains rather than with subjects "I don't think you can define subject areas in the pre-primary. You can't say we're doing maths now, we're doing science - the whole thing is encompassed in the pre-primary environment." Angela reported that she used observation with checklists because "it is quick and easy for me; you're on the spot. Having an assistant you can actually talk about something then and there, and in hindsight - "Do you remember when ... look at her now."

4.7.4 Application of Data on Children's Progress

At class level Angela reported using all records on children's progress in program planning, both on the day-to-day basis and in the long term. In addition it was used when required for parent communication throughout the year.

At school level the records were used in the following ways:

- a. Referral. To the school nurse, the school psychologist or the social worker, for things like speech, developmental delay, hearing, behavioural concerns.
- b. Continuity. Angela described how an overall record of progress in the form of a master checklist plus an 'overview' of each child. was given to the Year 1 teacher for continuity

Angela said that she was not required to provide a formal progress report to parents, but a scrapbook of children's work samples was sent home at the end of the year.

4.7.5 Teacher Concerns Regarding Pre-primary Assessment and Evaluation

One of Angela's concerns was that the Year 1 teacher may not look at the

assessment records given. "If the grade 1 teacher's going to put it straight in the bin, I don't see the point. It must be used, it must be appropriate, it must have a reason behind it." Angela was also concerned about the increasing amounts of assessment being required, although not at this school. She had been moved frequently since coming to Western Australia and reported that it was very difficult to work with so many SDPs which she had not helped to plan.

4.8 Case Study 6 "Karen"

4.8.1 An Overview

The school was in a rural sector and had an average of 200 students enrolled, there being 24 students in each of the two pre-primary classes. The two classes were situated in adjoining, purpose-made mobile classrooms close to the main school block, with a large enclosed outside area shared by the pre-primary classes, but separate from the rest of the school. Whilst one of the classes had only offered full-time places for one year, the participating class had been 'full-time' for five years. Karen joined the school at the beginning of 1996. She reported planning her curriculum using both domains and subjects equally, and linking outcomes in the domains with student outcome statements in the learning areas (subjects).

Karen had a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education plus a Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education. She taught Years 1-3 for between one and five years. This was her first year in a pre-primary class. She had attended a half day professional development session on evaluation, but did not consider that any new material was presented. She also attended a Seminar on Student Outcome Statements at a local university, after which she began to use outcome statements in her program and assessment. She also reported that she was one of a group of teachers involved in pioneering a fundamental movement program for the Education Department of Western Australia.

4.8.2 Methods of Gathering and Recording Information on Children's Progress

Table 12 illustrates the methods that Karen used in areas not covered by the SDP priorities for the current year, compiled from data collected in the first interview. It also

illustrates the methods stipulated in the SDP for assessment in the priority areas, collated from the second interview and the SDP shows

Table 12. Methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress. (Case Study 6)

| <u>GATHERING</u> (Karen's own methods) | <u>GATHERING</u> (SDP directed methods) |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| observation | nothing specifically required in the SDP |
| checklists | |
| children's work samples | |
| screening tests (for 'at risk' students) | |
| tests (Fundamental Movement Skills) | |
| one-to one testing | |
| collaboration with staff | |
| collaboration with parents | |
| <u>RECORDING</u> | |
| anecdotal records (every child) | |
| activity records | |
| master checklists | |
| rating scales | |
| child profiles | |
| First Steps continuum | |

4.8.2.1 Teacher's selection of Methods

Karen reported using observation as a predominant means of gathering information on children's progress, linking it with anecdotal notes:

I do observations. I mean you can't do anecdotal records without observations anyway. I look at what I'm observing for first - What am I looking for? I usually only look at three - five children over a given period of time, say, two days. I might look at some of their skills, or social/emotional development like how they interact with other children. . . I find if you sit back you can see a lot more than what you can when you're actually in there, but I use both ways.

Karen described her collection of work samples which were to be sent home at the end of the year:

At the moment I try to select work where it shows children's individualization so that for Mother's Day they painted a picture and I wrote underneath why they love their mum. Another time, I'd do a similar activity to see how they've developed in their art and speaking.

In addition to these methods of gathering material Karen reported using some one-to-one testing, particularly in the fundamental movement skills program, which she recorded onto checklists. She was also working with the school psychologist in seeking a screening test which could be run by the teacher in the classroom, rather than by the psychologist.

Karen reported using student outcome statements (SOS) both in her program planning and assessment planning, although this was not required by the school. She said:

I use the normal ones. No way am I using the Foundation statements ¹²- that's going backwards. We're working towards level 1 - that's what we're supposed to do. I couldn't believe it when they sent those out to us...

Table 13 illustrates information taken from the completed rating scale in which teachers indicated on a scale of 0-5 their usage of the various methods of gathering and recording information.

1

² Foundation Outcome Statements in Western Australia were designed by the Special Education group in the SOS trial. These statements were challenged particularly for their title by the ECE group because of the likelihood of Principals referring them to the P.P. teacher.

Table 13 Results of the rating scale.(Case Study 6)

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
|----------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|---|---|------------------------------|
| observation | mixed source checklist | use of tape recorder | | | published checklist |
| own checklists | "in the head" | | | | charts of progress (domains) |
| rating scale | | | | | sociograms |
| work samples | | | | | |
| staff collaboration | | | | | |
| parent collaboration | | | | | |
| subject linked | | | | | |
| screening tests | | | | | |
| student outcome statements | | | | | |
| anecdotal records | | | | | |
| activity records | | | | | |
| daily log | | | | | |
| continua | | | | | |
| child profiles | | | | | |
| time-interval records | | | | | |
| records SOS | | | | | |

Scale descriptor: 5 represents the most-used methods

4.8.2.2 SDP directed methods

At this school the pre-primaries have not been specifically included in the SDP but Karen was actively trying to include the classes within the existing priorities, having only joined the school staff in the current year and not having been involved in the team

planning the year's priorities. The first SDP priority was that of editing in the "First Steps" writing focus. Although the formal requirements in the SPD applied to the Year 1 upwards, Karen was focusing on editing in relation to the spoken word and in her model writing with the class. She said:

We write stories - daily, actually, on a big board, or we bring in pets or something and do report writing; but I talk to them about the punctuation and why we need capital letters. . . .I talk through with them while I'm writing.

Karen monitored children's progress by collecting samples of work, by checklists and anecdotal records. In addition she used the "First Steps" continua. In regards to the SDP involvement Karen said:

Well, not yet, because only this year have we (pre-primary) started to make an impact on how its going to affect the whole school. It's interesting... we're now getting involved. . . .We also talk about sentence construction and I correct the children's language as I write.

The second priority was learning difficulties in which a collaborative approach was being taken towards helping those already identified as being 'at risk' with regard to learning problems. Monitoring methods included diagnostic tests, class tests and parent interviews. Karen was using her "normal assessment techniques," particularly anecdotal records, to identify possible learning problems, referring those children to the school psychologist. At the time it was the psychologist who tested the children referred to her.

4.8.2.3 Other assessment requirements

In this class there were no further formal requirements regarding methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress.

4.8.3 Reasons for Choice of Methods

Karen reported the necessity of observation. She said: "It is the best form of

assessment. I can do lots of different situations. Each day brings different abilities.”

Nevertheless, she emphasized that it is a continuous process and needs to have work samples to back it up.

I couldn't say to you that I've looked at one child and that's where they are at because in two months time they might be that much better. In children's work I can see how they've progressed from the beginning of the year to what they'll be like at the end of the year.

Karen gave her reasons for using checklists:

Every child has a different rate of development in different skills. Checklists can be used easily in planning the next step for each child. I only use checklists relevant to what I'm looking for. . . It's what the children can do; what they can achieve.

She said: of SOS

They give direction but they're not truly specific in that they allow you to branch out a bit. They are a good, simple way of accountability. If someone says "what are you doing with these children; why are you doing that?" I'll say to them 'because this and this and this - that's what I'm working towards. It gives me accountability as well as being, to me, a very simple way of doing things.

4.8.4 Application of Data on Children's Progress

At class level Karen reported using the gathered information on children's progress in class and individual planning (planning for the next step.) She viewed this information as being very important to her personal accountability and to the children's development and learning. When she joined the school at the beginning of the year there were no assessment records required for SDP purposes. She had asked that the records she made in regard to the priority areas be incorporated into the MIS at the end of the year, to be used for school planning for 1997. Karen stated, however, that the records were used in other ways at school level.

- a. Referral - to the school psychologist or the nurse for education support, "language intense", speech or hearing problems.

b. Continuity. A summary of the records were given to the Year 1 teacher for continuity purposes.

Karen also reported that there had been no requirement for a formal progress report to parents when she joined the school, but that she had asked to provide a formal progress report to parents at the end of each semester. The format and content were designed by both pre-primary teachers in collaboration with the principal and the parent committee. Following the distribution of the first report in Semester 1, Karen believed that each report should be given out at a parent interview in order to minimize misunderstandings that might arise.

4.8.5 Teacher Concerns Regarding Pre-Primary Assessment and Evaluation

Karen was concerned that in her experience teachers in the pre-primary field had not been viewed as professionals by their school colleagues. She said that it is better if people are more accountable for what they do. She was also concerned that some teachers do a lot of work in keeping records that are never looked at or used by anyone. Although the next point may not seem directly related to assessment in the pre-primary it must be noted that Karen mentioned a concern that in her opinion there were too many transfers of teachers at the end of the year by the Department of Education, seemingly for little reason, making it difficult to 'feel part of' the SDP.

4.9 Was any Assessment Material Not Used?

This last question was asked in order to complete investigation into the use of gathered information on children's progress. Teachers answered that in spite of other uses or misuses all the gathered information was used by themselves at the class level. In cases 2, 3 and 4 teachers all answered that all the information collected on children's progress was used. In classes 1, 5 and 6 the teachers answered that some material was not used for the intended purpose. In case study 1, Lynn was dubious as to whether all the material passed onto Year 1 was used and in case study 5, Angela said that in her experience (prior to this school) much of the material passed onto the Year 1 had not been looked at. Nevertheless, the teachers reported that all material was used in some way, although, perhaps, not for its intended purpose.

5 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results were analyzed according to the headings set out in chapter four. In this chapter the case studies have not been separated. Discussion relating to the findings has been included at the conclusion of each section. In addition discussion regarding the conclusions as a whole has been included at the end of the chapter.

5.1 The Overviews

Several points were considered in the overview of the classes which placed each class in the context of the larger school setting and also in the context of the wider environment as it related to the current study. Context was an important criterion in this study since the conceptual framework used, that of transactional theory, stresses the transactional relationship between microsystems, and between systems in effecting decisions made by each teacher in each case study.

Table 14 illustrates each of the case studies in relation to the school context. There are several points in these results which are of significance. Firstly, Katie's class was in an early childhood unit (a particular type of school) catering for children in pre-primary to Year 2. In this unit all school collaborative planning took place within an early childhood framework rather than that of the whole primary (pre-primary-Year 7) school context of the other cases. In relation to this context Katie's class was the only class to be fully integrated with the remainder of the school in outside play. All the cases were housed in on-site facilities, in near proximity to the main school, with four cases being part of the junior school cluster. Five of the cases had offered full-time programs for some years, one of the cases being in its second year of offering a full-time program.

Thus there had been similar amounts of time for the majority for the classes to become integrated in the collaborative planning system of the school. Some distinguishing characteristics of the sixth case, which has only been offered full-time for one year, will be discussed later in the chapter. A further point of significance was that half the classes were the only pre-primary class in their school whereas half had another pre-primary class in the school, which meant a difference in the number of pre-primary teachers involved in collaborative planning, and also that where there were two classes there was the likelihood of collaborative transactions between them.

Table 14 Overview of classes in the context of the school.

| | <u>No school enrolments</u> | <u>Special features</u> | <u>No. p/p classes</u> | <u>Position</u> | <u>Yard facilities</u> | <u>No. years as full-time.</u> |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Class 1 Lynne | 180 | PSP* school | one | to side of main school | own yard | 4 |
| Class 2 Sue | 300 | PSP school | two | in cluster | own yard | 4 |
| Class 3 Katie | 250 | ECE unit | two | in cluster | open to school | 5 |
| Class 4 Jo | 200 | | one | in cluster | own yard | 5 |
| Class 5 Angela | 200 | | one | in cluster | own yard | 5 |
| Class 6 Karen | 200 | | two | to side of main school | own yard | 1 |

* PSP - priority schools; p/p - pre-primary; ECE - early childhood education

Table 15 consolidates the information about teacher training, and teaching experience, contributing to the information in the context of the wider environment.

Table 15 Overview of the classes in the context of the wider environment.

| | <u>Teacher training</u> | <u>No years at case school</u> | <u>Years teaching other than p/p</u> | <u>Years teaching p/p</u> | <u>P/D in assessment</u> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Class 1 Lynne | ECE | First year | 1-5 in Yr 1 and R.I.P* | 2 | .5 day |
| Class 2 Sue | ECE | 2 | 1-5 in Year 5 | 5 - 10 | .5 day |
| Class 3 Katie | ECE | First year | 1-5 in Yr 5 & 7 in 4yr olds. | 1 - 5 | .5 day |
| Class 4 Jo | ECE | 4 | nil | 13 | nil |
| Class 5 Angela | ECE | First year | 21 in lower primary in England | 6 | 1 day |
| Class 6 Karen | ECE | First year | 1-5 in years 1 - 3 | First year. | 1.5 days |

* R.I.P. - Rural integration program; ECE - Early childhood education;

p/p - pre-primary

It is clear that all the teachers were early childhood trained and that five of them had more than one year experience teaching pre-primary, whilst three had more than five years at that level. It is also clear that professional development on assessment received by teachers varied between nil and 1.5 days. The teacher in class 6 reported that one day spent on Student Outcome Statements was useful but other than that all

teachers reported that the professional development did not contribute any new information. Thus, apart from considering the experience of teacher 6 later in this chapter, the possible influence of professional development on the choices made by teachers in their assessment of children's progress will be discounted.

5.2 Teacher-selected Methods of Gathering and Recording Information on

Children's Progress

All teachers chose to use the following methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress:

| <u>Gathering</u> | <u>Recording</u> |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Observation | Anecdotal |
| Checklists | Checklists |
| Collections of children's work | Rating scales |
| Collaboration with staff | |
| Collaboration with parents | |

However, it must be noted that although all teachers used anecdotal notes, three used them for every child and three used them on a 'needs' basis for selected children.

In addition at least one of the following interrelated methods was used by all of the teachers: running record, daily diary, activity records. All the above methods common to all teachers are the informal methods sited in the Literature Review as indicative of traditional early childhood curriculum. Since all teachers were trained in early childhood education these choices may be seen as a link between teacher training and choices of methods used in gathering and recording information on children's progress.

Two teachers reported using standardized testing as a choice. In case 1 Lynn reported using testing of her own choice in relation to her Perceptual Motor Program, but this took the form of checklists, whilst in case 6 Karen reported searching for a screening test which could be used in the classroom by the teacher rather than the psychologist. Although Karen chose this direction, further examination of the results shows that some of her choices were linked to the priorities of the SDP which had not included the pre-primary in the planning. She also reported using tests in her Fundamental Movement Program. However, it was noted here that the teacher was concurrently involved in the working party formulating a program by that name for the Education Department of Western Australia. She was using her test results in program assessment and stressed that the working party was at that time recommending the tests be used only on those children the teachers thought to be 'at risk'. Katie also reported selecting some published tests but not in this class due to the amount of tests required in the SDP.

The Student Outcome Statements (as produced by the Education Department) were being used in one case only (Karen). There is evidence of at least two possible reasons for this. Firstly, Karen had been to a seminar at a local University on the Outcome Statements (recorded as part of her PD experience). Secondly, involvement in the production of curriculum material would probably have exposed her to the use of Outcome Statements.

5.3 Methods of Gathering and Recording Information on Children's Progress

Directed in the SDPs

It is evident that five of the six cases were not formally included in the SDP although teachers in these cases participated in the SDP priorities to varying extents,

whilst one case was fully integrated into the SDP. The latter was a designated early childhood context (K-2) which operated in the absence of those teaching Year 3 and upward. The extent of involvement in the SDP could be seen to lie on a continuum from almost none to full integration. The following discussion on SDP requirements relate to that which is being followed by the teachers whether by negotiation or by formal inclusion.

There are many similarities between the SDP methods and those selected by the teachers but there are also some differences. Table 16 illustrate how the methods stipulated in the SDPs contrast with the teacher's choice of method and methods required directly by the principal. The results suggest that there may be a mismatch between the methods of assessment traditional to early childhood reflected in the SDPs and the requirements directed by the principals.

Table 16 Differences in the methods used in teacher-selection, SDP, or by direction of the Principal

| <u>Class</u> | <u>Teacher-selection</u> | <u>SDP</u> | <u>Direction of principal</u> |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Class 1 "Lynne" | PMP testing; collaboration with parents and staff; activity records; rating scales; daily notes; sociograms; stored 'in the head' | "First Steps" work samples and continua; written 'Have a go' awards; behavioural records | Reading attitude test; Metro Readiness test |
| Class 2 "Sue" | Collaboration with parents and staff; audio-taping; running records; rating scales | "First Steps" work samples | Master checklist for school evaluation (maths and literacy) |
| Class 3 "Katie" | Collaboration with staff and parents; tape-recorder; rating scales; class diary; camera | Diagnostic testing (social skills); one-to-one testing (3 subjects) TOLD test; Let's Decode test(outside testers); "First Steps" work samples and continua(4 areas) maths journal | End of year screening test(teacher's selection) |
| Class 4 "Jo" | Collaboration with staff and parents; anecdotal notes; daily work pad | "First Steps" work samples; PMP testing; behavioural charts; records of awards; "First Steps" continua | Screening test in the form of a master checklist. |
| Class 5 "Angela" | Observation, work samples, checklists; collaboration with staff and parents; anecdotal; daily log; child profiles; rating scales; 'in the head' | None for pre-primary | School evaluation test (no named test stipulated) |
| Class 6 "Karen" | Observation; checklists; work samples; collaboration with staff and parents; screening for 'at risk'; movement program tests; one-to one tests; anecdotal notes; activity records; "First Steps" work samples and continua; master checklists; rating scales; child profiles | Nothing stipulated | None |

In five of the cases it is evident that the teachers were gathering and recording progress information on "First Steps" literacy programs. Four of the five teachers placed children on the "First Steps" continua. The fifth teacher worked on the "First Steps" checklists and made separate collections of children's work in this area. Information on children's progress for "First Steps" was collected primarily through observation methods and recorded predominantly on checklists and through collections of children's work, methods which reflect early childhood philosophy. The continua could be described as developmental since the levels and phases do not correspond to Year levels or chronological age grouping. Theoretically, use of the continua shows how each child is progressing irrespective of others in the class. This method is not meant to compare children. It might be assumed, therefore, that use of the "First Steps" program in the SDP reflected early childhood practices. However, the "First Steps" program referred to in these cases was in literacy and was therefore focused on a subject base rather than a domain base traditional to early childhood education.

In two cases (classes 3 and 4) there was evidence of a greater number of tests used in the SDPs than in teacher-selected methods, particularly in Katie's class. Katie reported diagnostic tests in social skills, one-to-one testing in three subject areas, the "TOLD" and "Let's Decode" tests in language all of which were required for the MIS. Jo reported using a published checklist for PMP but that it was not required for the MIS. With the exception of the social skills test all the other tests were subject oriented. Social skills may have been described as related to a developmental domain, but it may be questionable whether the use of a standardized test 'matched' notions of individual developmental areas. Since standardized testing was seen in the literature to be indicative of a 'push down effect from the upper primary onto early childhood education in the USA the emergence of standardized testing might be seen as the

emergence of a similar 'push down effect' in these Western Australian cases. However, the introduction of some of these tests could also be seen as moving in the directions suggested by the Education Department (1995b) concerning the possible benefits of screening tests for diagnostic purposes if "selected judiciously" (p.41). It is also possible that this statement is indicative of a 'push down' effect on the early childhood education program within the Education Department itself.

Other differences emerged in classes 1 and 4. Lynn reported the use of a school behavioural record if it should be needed whilst she and Jo were included in a school-level system of awards which necessitated charts and records for submission to the relevant 'key' teacher.

There were also some methods selected by teachers which did not appear in the SDPs. All teachers emphasized the importance of collaboration with the aide in gathering and recording information on children's progress and reported their appreciation for the opportunity of discussing classroom planning as a result of the recorded information. They also reported the importance of collaboration with parents both in informal conversations and in more formal interview situations. Collaboration with the aide and with parents has always been emphasized in early childhood education yet it was not evident in any of the SDPs in this study. Other methods not mentioned in the SDPs, were the use of activity records, daily notes, rating scales, sociograms or use of tape-recorder and/or camera. These are also methods indicative of early childhood education and are, therefore, noticeable for their absence in the SDPs examined in this study.

These cases do not show conclusive evidence of a more academic approach being thrust upon the pre-primary through the SDP. The fact that five of the classes were not

formally included in every aspect of the SDP would indicate the opposite, that the SDP was not influencing the methods and use of assessment in the pre-primary. However, the evidence of a more academic approach is more covert. The absence of some traditional early childhood methods in the SDPs, particularly collaboration with staff and parents, the addition of standardized testing techniques and the emergence of a subject-oriented framework are all indicators of approaches traditionally used in the upper levels of the primary school. This covert evidence is further enhanced by reference to the literature. It is evident that the majority of methods selected by the teachers characterized 'observation of process' and use of other 'contextual measures' illustrated in Figure 3, both of these being indicative of early childhood education. In contrast, methods which emerged in the SDPs and also in the requirements by the principals applied largely to 'observation of the product' and used 'decontextualized measures', indicative of upper primary levels of schooling.

Class 6, however, presented quite a different scenario. Karen was not happy to find that the pre-primary was not included in the SDP. Indeed, she felt that pre-primary teachers in general were viewed by other primary teachers as "less than professionals" and in response to this belief was making every effort to be fully involved in the SDP and in the school's assessment. Karen reported using observation, checklists, work samples, anecdotal notes, activity records, child profiles and rating lists. She also reported her use of collaboration with her aide and with parents. All these methods, therefore, reflected traditional early childhood practices. However, she reported using screening tests for children thought to be 'at risk', tests for her fundamental movement program, one-to-one testing, and taking "First Steps" through to the continuum in "editing". The screening tests and the "First Steps" assessment were following the

pattern SDP requirements for Year 1 but modified for her pre-primary class. There is, therefore, some evidence of a 'push-down' effect in class 6 in the emergence of tests and subject orientation. There was no evidence of direct 'push down' of the SDP on the pre-primary in this case but it is possible that Karen's previous primary milieu has predisposed her to want to go this way, perhaps for team cohesion or inclusion purposes when viewing school staff as a whole group. In this sense there is evidence of a 'push-down' effect in case 6.

5.4. Other Assessment Requirements

The results also showed that some assessment was required by other sources from within the school, necessitating in some instances different methods, as illustrated in Table 17. From this it may be seen that five of the six teachers were required to perform some form of assessment for continuation into Year one at the conclusion of the year.

Table 17 Assessment required from other sources in the schools.

| <u>Class</u> | <u>Required assessment</u> | <u>Source</u> |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Reading attitude test Bullus and Cole Test | Principal.(test selected by school staff) Principal |
| 2 | School evaluation test | Principal |
| 3 | 'Screening test' | Year 1 teacher |
| 4 | 'Screening test' | Principal |
| 5 | School evaluation test | Principal |
| 6 | Nil | |

These all used the term 'test' as a descriptor, although it was evident that some of these were master checklists derived from teacher's 'normal' checklist procedures. In class 1 the test was specified; it was a readiness test but entry to Year 1 did not depend on the results. Two of the other tests were referred to by the teachers as school evaluation tests and two as screening tests, but all were for the benefit of the children and the Year 1 teacher for continuation purposes. In class 2 the 'test' was in fact a master checklist giving an overall view of each child going into Year 1, but at the time of the research the class 5 teacher did not know what form this 'test' was to take. The tests reported as 'screening' tests in classes 3 and 4 also seemed to be master checklists, although Katie in class 3 was uncertain what would be expected at the end of the year. It would seem, therefore that the term 'screening test' was rather loosely used and was accepted by the researcher in the course of each teacher's discussions. Thus observations about the use of screening tests cannot be used as evidence in the sense that Meisles (1992) defined it (see Chapter 2).

There is, however, clear evidence of a 'push-down' effect on the pre-primary classes in the subject-oriented nature of the additional requirements and in the type of language most common to primary schooling. The majority of participants were able to articulate their position in the school planning groups but there was no such opportunity reported in regards to principal's requirements.

5.5 Use of Student Outcome Statements

One teacher in this study reported using the Student Outcome Statements (SOS) published by the Education Department of Western Australia, whereas some of the teachers stated that they would have to start using them (SOS) at some time. It must be

noted, however that at the time of the fieldwork, the trials for those Outcome Statements had just been completed and that the Report on the trials(1996) had not been released. This study showed clear evidence of subject-based SDP requirements although the majority were not using the SOS. Since the Western Australian Curriculum Framework and the SOS are framed around eight learning (subject) areas it is logical to suppose that a greater emphasis on a subject framework will occur as these are implemented. Since the curriculum framework and the SOS include both the Kindergarten and Pre-primary Years it is also logical to conclude that some of the ground for articulating the “early childhood way” (Gifford, 1991) will likely be eroded. Similarly, the production and distribution of the Foundational Student Outcome Statements, developed by the Special Education group, will further add to that erosion. Although these were compiled to be used for children described as “developmentally delayed or immature” (EDWA, 1996.p.102) rather than for ‘mainstream’ children it is possible that principals and other primary school staff will mistakenly apply the term “foundational’ to the kindergarten/pre-primary areas. This is particularly likely given that States such as South Australia use “Foundation Statements” very differently.(see, for example, Department for Education and Children’s Services: Foundation Areas of Learning, 1996).

Erosion of ground may still further occur with the introduction of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework which also includes kindergarten and pre-primary in its subject-based orientation.

Literature showed that early childhood educators made a number of recommendations in the Report on the SOS trials (EDWA, 1996) including the production of support materials “to assist teachers to monitor both the learning areas and the domains of child development (p. 103). Literature also showed the possibility of further teacher support

through the Commonwealth Government Senate Inquiry, initiated in 1996, as it examined the extent to which the National Profiles and Statements incorporated developmentally appropriate practice. Application of these strategies is yet to be fulfilled. It should be noted, however, that apart from the Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Education, the draft of which has been widely quoted in this study, there are no other support materials currently available to pre-primary or kindergarten teachers from the Education Department of Western Australian regarding links between developmentally appropriate practice and Student Outcome Statements.

5.6 Use of the Rating Scale

Teachers were also asked to complete a rating scale designed to show a continuum of their most used/least used methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress. They were asked to indicate their methods used, expressed as a value of 0-5, where 5 represented the most used method. During the rating process teachers were permitted to use scores more than once if this was relevant. They were also requested to enter a score in every category. However, only three classes showed a reasonably scattered result (classes 1, 4 and 5). In class 2 Sue had selected categories on both the extremes, whilst Katie and Karen in classes 3 and 6 placed the majority of methods in the most used areas. In class 3 this may be because of the amount of assessment required and the variety of assessment techniques stipulated. In class 6, Karen emphasized her need for accountability and was using a variety of methods of assessment in order to become part of the school development planning cycle.

As noted above in the interviews the use of the term 'screening test' was also not always clear in the participants' responses. Teachers seemed to be using screening tests

and school evaluation synonymously some of the time. This was illustrated through a discrepancy between interview responses and the rating scale. For example, in classes 2 and 6 screening tests were placed in the most used category but had not been mentioned in the first interview when the teachers were asked what methods they used. Nevertheless, in the second interview Karen had stated that she was looking for a screening test to use in the classroom. In the latter case a screening test was clearly what was being sought as it was for identification of 'at risk' students. Another discrepancy that appeared occurred in classes 2 and 5 where subject-linked assessment was noted in the 'not used at all' category, yet both teachers carried out assessment linked to subject priorities such as First Steps language and technology. In class 3 Student Outcome Statements had been placed in the most used category but in commenting on the Education Department statements Katie expressed a comment on not knowing what they were all about. Similarly in class 4 the SOS had been placed in category 3 but according to the interview were not used at all. However, both SDPs used the term student outcome statements in relation to their priorities, but they were not those found in the Education Department Draft booklet. The rating scale did not make a distinction between the types of SOS. Thus there may have been discrepancies in the use of the term in the rating scale. These discrepancies could have been picked up in the research and clarified with the teachers, had the researcher not opted to leave the rating scale with the participants at the first interview, and collect it during the second interview. Had the rating scale been left with a stamped, addressed envelope for return prior to the second interview the researcher may have noted and been able to clarify these apparent discrepancies during the field-based period.

5.6 Reasons for Choice of Methods Used

Results showed similarities among the teachers in the reasons for their choice of methods. Similar responses were as follows.

| | | |
|--------------|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Observation | | <p>“You pick up lots through observation”</p> <p>“ Feel comfortable with it”</p> <p>“Most suited to the environment”</p> <p>“Easy to get a feel for the child”</p> <p>“Best form/ different settings, different abilities.”</p> <p>“Informal environment needs informal methods”</p> |
| Checklists | | <p>“Quick and easy”</p> <p>“Can be modified to suit situation”</p> |
| Work samples | | <p>“Can plan for each child from these”</p> <p>“Good indicator of child’s progress”</p> |

It was noted in the overviews that all the teachers in this study were trained in early childhood education. Since observation, checklists and work samples are those of traditional early childhood education, there is evidence that teacher choice of these methods reflect their training. The only teacher to be using the Education Department Student Outcome Statements (class 6) stated: “They give accountability and direction”.

As already noted this teacher had attended professional development on SOS and had been using them in preparation of curriculum material for EDWA. Two of the participants noted that they were influenced in their choice of method, one by a classroom teacher whilst she had been on school practice and one by the university course.

5.8 Application of Data on Children's Progress

These have been divided into two sections for analysis, firstly class level use and secondly, school level use. The latter includes the assessment made as part of the SDP process and those from other sources. There was evidence to show that in both levels of usage all the case studies concurred with the types of use cited in the Literature Review of this study.

Class level

Results of this study revealed that all six participants reported program planning to be the main use of assessment data at class level. All teachers stated this was for the individual child, the group, and the whole class, thus concurring with the view given in the literature that assessment should benefit the child in some way. All participants also reported communication with parents to be an important use of assessment data, although there were different methods of communication used. These types of assessment were referred to as formative assessment in the literature. This study adds weight to the notion of a formative element at class level being an important part of a total assessment program.

School level

At school level all participants reported using assessment for referral purposes, again revealing the use of formative assessment; They also reported the use of their assessment data in school planning and continuity purposes, both forms of summative assessment. In the literature summative assessment referred to assessment taking place at the end of a given period within the curriculum leading to school-level planning, placing of students for further learning or providing comparative information at school, department, state or national levels. It was also evident that summative assessment was for the benefit of the child, group or class.

In every case the teachers reported an increase in assessment for accountability purposes, whether it was through the SDP process, or through direct discussion with the principal. In this study it is argued that to some extent assessment used for accountability purposes is summative since it is collected at the end of a given period, and is used for planning for the following year, simultaneously demonstrating teacher and school accountability. Similarly use of SDP assessment data for analysis in the MIS may be termed summative, although some of the data may have been used formatively during the year as well. In one class the use was more diverse. In addition to the types of use stated, there were: planning for specialist staffing, placing of children, and evaluation of programs. The teacher explained that placement of children not only referred to special needs programs, but also placement in the Year 1 classes the following year. She reported that one of the classes would consist entirely of Year 1 children whereas the other class would consist of a mixture of two or three Year levels (still to be finalized), and that assessment in the pre-primary would determine in which of the classes a child would be placed.

None of the teachers in this study reported any form of assessment used in providing direct comparative information about students, groups or schools such as that referred to in the literature relating to the UK. However, it is clear that in this study the increase in summative assessment was not at the expense of formative assessment.

5.9 Reporting

There was evidence of the use of formal written reporting to parents of the pre-primary children in this study, although informal communication methods were also in place. Two teachers were required to prepare a written report to parents, one was required on a by-term basis, but the teacher was able to design her own format, the other being required each semester in which the teacher was to use the school format (ECE unit) designed by the staff as a group. A third participant had commenced using a written report for parents each semester, but had decided that it might be better to 'share' the written document at an interview with the parents before giving it to them. She reported some problems in communication arising from the written report. The emergence of written reporting is further evidence of a 'push down' of upper primary practices on early childhood education. Karen's perceived need for parent interviews in which to distribute the written reports may indicate the need for less formal reporting methods traditionally used in the early childhood field. On the other hand, it may also be seen to be following the Western Australian Education Department's (1995b) guidelines on reporting. The Department stated that formal, academic, written reports were inappropriate for young children but it did allow for written summaries of progress regarding development to be used with less formal methods of parent communication. This is another instance reflecting a 'push down' effect within the

Education Department of Western Australia.

5.10 Accountability

In analyzing the concept of accountability in the case studies several areas of the results were examined. These included the use of assessment reported by teachers, assessment required by the SDP, assessment required by other sources, and comments made by teachers in general dialogue, noted in other sections of the results.

Angela did not mention accountability in her reported use of assessment, nor in any other respect. Lynn did not list accountability as a use of assessment, but reported it as the purpose of the behavioural notes associated with the SDP priority. She inferred accountability when she reported her interviews with the principal in saying "as a staff we have to show or be aware of the indicators of success" (p80). Jo and Karen emphasized that their assessment of children's work gave them personal accountability listing this as a use of assessment. Jo said "there's no emphasis on that [school accountability] because there are no specific requirements made" (p. 106). However, Karen stated that she was seeking to have the pre-primary included in the SDP for accountability. Sue and Katie reported the importance of assessment both in personal and school accountability. All teachers who reported accountability linked school accountability with the SDP.

Lynn, Sue and Katie were required to show their assessment data to their principals together with other planning documents. They all viewed this as an accountability process.

Five of the teachers viewed the whole of their assessment in the light of accountability, not just that associated with the SDP. Katie, on the other hand, viewed the SDP and the interviews with her principal as accountability. It should be noted, however, that

practically all assessment was stipulated in the SDP either as priority area or as a priority 'on maintenance'.

A case was made in the introduction and was expanded in the literature review that the SDP was a major tool of accountability in Western Australian schools. As such, assessment and evaluation were examined in the context of the SDP in this study. Evidence clearly shows that in the pre-primary case which was fully integrated throughout the SDP, the teacher was held to be accountable through the SDP and through interviews required by the principal. However the remaining cases involvement in the SPD was not formally required and occurred to varying extents. This does not imply that these cases were not accountable. Assessment data required in the SDP are not the only data through which teachers or schools could be confirmed as being accountable. For example the then Ministry of Education (1991) stated that teachers had been accountable before the introduction of the MIS and SDP. In addition the literature gave a wider meaning to accountability suggesting that accountability is an overarching purpose of all assessment data at the same time incorporating other facets of the planning process. Examples of this were the accountability cycle from the Education Department of Western Australian (1995) and the accountability statements from the Education Department of South Australia (1996). However, in relation to accountability the Education Department of Western Australia (1995) reconstructed the accountability cycle to include the MIS (p.53). It also referred to the MIS as providing the "critical link between system-level monitoring of curriculum and accountability at the school level" (p. 52). In this study evidence suggests that all the participants viewed themselves as being accountable and their assessment and evaluation data were part of that accountability although five were not formally included in the SDP. Yet literature clearly indicated that accountability is a purpose of

assessment and evaluation.

5.11 Teacher's concerns

There was little evidence of a consensus of opinion in relation to the concerns teachers had on assessment in pre-primary. Three teachers expressed disquiet that the work done for the Year 1 teacher in respect to continuity between these years might never be used although they had all reported this to be an important use of assessment. One teacher was troubled that all assessment produced for the school level might not be used. Two of the teachers were uneasy about the amount of assessment data being required, one of these being the case in which there were three main priority areas and eight priorities 'on maintenance'.

There was one element about which five of the participants agreed although it was expressed at different times and in different ways through the interviews, rather than as a direct response to the question on concerns. This was the problem of teachers being moved from school to school each year, meaning that they spent hours planning for an SDP in which they could not share. Rather they inherit another SDP that someone else had planned. One of the purposes of devolution to the schools was so that teachers had a sense of 'owning' the SDP. This was part of the accountability process. The effectiveness of this strategy has been somewhat negated by the amount of staff movement.

5.12 Transactional Theory

It was stated earlier in this study that what happens in the pre-primary classroom is the product of many two-way transactions at various levels of the ecology. This study examined various aspects of assessment and evaluation in pre-primary classes including that of the immediate context of the school development plan. In that immediate context assessment practices related to the current school priority areas were designated the previous year through a collaborative planning process. The principal, teachers from the mainstream primary school and pre-primary teachers were thus involved in producing the SDP through a series of transactions.

In this study it was found that four out of the six selected teachers were new to the school 'inheriting' a pre-set SDP. In three of these cases evidence showed that the teachers were able to negotiate regarding the extent to which they participated in the SDP, since none of these pre-primary classes had been formally included in the Plan. The fourth case in which the teacher was new to the school was distinguished from the others in that it was fully included in the SDP without room for negotiation. In this case there was evidence of extensive use of tests, subject-based continua in literacy and traditional early childhood education methods. There was also evidence that the extensive use of tests was contrary to the teachers own selection of methods. They may have been planned as a result of transactions between staff but in this case were pre-set expectations of the teacher.

This evidence may highlight a 'break-down' in the system of school development planning. Teachers produce a SDP through transactions with the expectation that they will feel they 'own' the resulting curriculum rather than receiving a pre-set curriculum. However, through necessity, the Plan is produced after many hours of teacher-input at

the conclusion of one year for use in the following year. It would seem, therefore, that movement of teachers, particularly where movement had not been requested negates the sense of 'ownership'. It may threaten successful implementation of transacted decisions. There may also be the possibility of direct conflict regarding assessment processes between the in-coming teacher and the SDP possibly without room for further negotiation until the preparation of the next SDP.

In a wider ecological context there was clear evidence of a one-way influence from teacher-training institutions on the selected teachers. All the participants were trained in early childhood education and all reported selection of traditional early childhood methods and use of assessment. There was little professional development reported in this study but that which was mentioned reflected early childhood philosophy and practice. However it is not possible to comment on a two-way transaction within the confines of this study.

Recent literature from Good Start (now the Early Childhood Education Program) of the Education Department of Western Australia seems to endorse the use of traditional early childhood curriculum, including assessment and evaluation practices. On the other hand, it also seems to embrace the introduction of the subject-based Curriculum Framework and Student Outcome Statements, regardless of the suggestions made by early childhood educators in the Report of Student Outcomes (EDWA, 1996). This highlights the need for early childhood educators, particularly those in kindergarten and pre-primary classes, to articulate their position not only in the immediate context of the SDP but also at the different levels of the ecology, thus effecting transactions at each level of the ecology.

5.13 Any Assessment Material not used

In this there was a consensus of opinion in that all participants reported using all of the information gathered themselves even if it was not used anywhere else. However, three teachers stated that in their opinion some of the information was not used for the intended purpose. Such comments suggest that further investigations of this area might be important.

5.14 Summary

The background to this study noted a number of changes in Western Australia regarding the provision of pre-school education, as a result of which education for children turning five clearly became mainstream school business. Policy changes were also outlined including the introduction of school based planning in which schools were required to formulate a school development plan on an annual basis. Each school would demonstrate its accountability in relation to the plan. It was envisaged by the researcher that early childhood teachers may experience dilemmas concerning assessment and evaluation practices when seeking to integrate developmental perspectives with the whole school frameworks particularly in relation to the school development plan.

The first step taken in this study was to examine the methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress selected by participating teachers. Although there was some evidence of standardized testing being selected by teachers it was clear that all the teachers involved used the methods described in the literature as being traditionally associated with early childhood education. However, it was also clear that whilst methods required in the school development plans included some additional 'testing', use of continua, and behavioural records these did not appear to

eclipse the use of traditional early childhood education methods. It would seem, however, that the additional requirements made, both in the SDP and by some of the school principals, had led to an increase in the amount of assessment required particularly in Katie's class. It must be noted that time spent in assessment tasks is time not spent in the teaching/learning process. It is also possible that SDP assessment and principal-directed assessment may be so time consuming that teachers have little time left for assessment tasks in areas of the curriculum not deemed in an SDP as priority areas.

The study also examined how the gathered information was used both at class and school levels. It also explored the use of assessment data in relation to the SDP. Evidence clearly showed that teachers reported using both their own assessment data and that required by the SDP in classroom planning directly for the benefit of the children. It was also evident that summaries of teacher's own assessment data, plus some of the data required by the SDP and/or the principal were used in school-level planning and in continuity, likely benefiting the children over a longer time span. Mention was also made by those teachers formally included in the SDP that assessment data required by the SDP was used in the preparation of the school analysis for the MIS. These data were for demonstration of school accountability. All teachers involved in the study reported maintaining their 'developmental perspectives' in regard to the the assessment and evaluation practices they used. There is, however, the possibility that SDP requirements alone may ultimately constitute accountability both for the teacher and the school. Since this study showed clear evidence of a predominance of subject-orientation in the SDPs such a possibility would mean that accountability would depend upon subject achievement rather than on the developmental domains appropriate for young children..

School development planning was introduced as a collaborative planning process involving all staff. One of the purposes was to produce curriculum to suit the school community with a sense of "ownership" amongst the staff. The SDP is, as noted in the literature, a major tool of accountability in Western Australian schools. Thus, in theory, collaborative planning allows all teachers to articulate their positions. In theory, therefore, pre-primary teachers have the opportunity to articulate and negotiate appropriate practice to meet the needs of pre-primary children. In this study evidence showed that the majority of participants had negotiated the extent to which they participated in the SDP or had inherited a pre-set Plan where such negotiations had taken place. This may not be the case in all school development planning groups. Other teachers may find themselves in a planning situation similar to Katie's class in which there was no room for negotiation and in which there was extensive use of testing techniques. Tayler (1996), quoted in the literature, emphasized the necessity of articulating the early childhood position at school level as part of the duty of the teacher in ensuring the best for the children. In practice, this may be very difficult for some teachers. Other difficulties may arise in practice, where the teacher is on temporary status. He/she may feel that in certain planning situations articulating their position may jeopardize their performance score and therefore their position for the following year. These feelings, whether perceived or real, may cause a break-down in the theoretical intentions of the planning process. It has been noted earlier in this study that break-down in the planning process can also occur as a result of pre-primary teachers being moved from school to school, especially when there has not been a request to transfer.

One of the challenges reported by Gifford (1993) was that teachers should "retain the right to teach the early childhood way". This study showed clear evidence of policies and practices which have eroded teacher's ability to meet that challenge. In the

near future there are Education Department plans which may make this increasingly difficult to achieve. For example, the integration of all pre-primary classes in a full-time, five days a week program situated on school site, and the implementation of the subject-based curriculum framework and the Student Outcome Statements. In theory, at least, the 'machinery' is there for pre-primary teachers to articulate the 'early childhood way' through school development planning. This may be the major challenge and the major process by which teachers will retain the freedom to teach the 'early childhood way'.

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APPENDIX A

WORKING POSITION ON NATIONALLY DEVELOPED PROFILES AND CURRICULUM

STATEMENTS TAKEN FROM: AECA'S POLICIES AND WORKING POSITIONS. SEPTEMBER, 1993. PAGE NO. 79.

1. AECA believes that statements and profiles must be seen as but one of a range of resources available to school communities to support "*curriculum realisation processes which create different experiences for different children.*".ACSA. 1992
2. AECA supports the development and dissemination of nationally developed profiles and curriculum statements which:
 - establish what can be agreed about what all children should know and so provide a curriculum guarantee for all children regardless of their class, culture, race, gender, physical disability, intellectual disability or where they live;
 - provide a statement around which systems may build their curriculum and schools may shape their curriculum programs.
3. AECA believes that nationally developed profiles and curriculum statements are not the whole curriculum in schools but form a nationally agreed component of school curricula;
4. AECA believes that use of the nationally developed profiles and curriculum statements should not undermine the development of an integrated, holistic approach to curriculum planning at the school level. This approach to curriculum should be supported by:
 - the development of resources which support the use of statements and profiles in a way which supports quality early childhood practice in the classroom;
 - support for professional development in schools;
 - resourcing for early childhood curriculum development support services;
 - regular review of curriculum programming at the school level.
5. However, AECA supports monitoring the implementation of the profiles to ascertain that they encompass all groups traditionally disadvantaged by schooling.
6. AECA supports the use of nationally developed profiles where the purpose is to aid

the improvement of teaching and learning in the classroom and which involve the development of a common language for reporting student achievement to parents at the school level.

7. AECA opposes:

- the use of profiles for state and national testing and/or reporting;**
- the specification of outcomes through profiles for each grade level;**
- the use of profiles to prescribe the curriculum of schools.**

8. AECA believes that structures for the development and evaluation of nationally developed profiles and curriculum statements:

- must be based on the premise that schools must be enabled to be creators of curriculum programs which meet the needs of their students;**
- should be developed through collaborative processes which build on the best practices in schools;**
- should enable teachers, parents and students to work together on important curriculum issues at the school level;**
- must take place within a timeframe that is realistic in terms of the desired breadth of participants.**

9. AECA believes that, at the school level, use of statements and profiles should be monitored.

Monitoring should include the examination of:

- the usefulness of statements and profiles in supporting school based curriculum planning;**
- their impact on school teaching and assessment practices;**
- their impact on the workload of teachers;**
- the professional development needs of parents and teachers;**
- and**
- the usefulness of profiles in reporting on student outcomes.**

APPENDIX B

Copy of the letter of introduction for the school principals and the teachers.

Address

Dear

I am a teacher currently completing a Master of Education Degree in the area of early childhood education at Edith Cowan University. My supervisor is Associate Professor Collette Tayler, who is based at the Churchlands Campus.

As part of the requirements of this course I am carrying out a research study in early childhood education, and have chosen to investigate methods of gathering and recording information for evaluation of children and children's work currently being used in pre-primary classes, together with the teacher's reasons for these choices. In addition I am investigating how this information is used by the teacher and whether there are any relationships between these and the School Development Plan. In doing this I am not comparing one school directly with another, nor one teacher with another, but am aiming to describe the link, if any, between the School Development Plan and the methods of gathering and recording data for evaluation in each of the schools selected. Since evaluation is ideally integrated into the pre-primary curriculum, change in evaluation methods may indicate changes in the type of program offered within the pre-primary area.

A case study method will be used involving six full-time pre-primary classes, determined through the process of random selection from within three Perth metropolitan districts.

I would greatly appreciate your support in this study in allowing me to gather information for the study from the pre-primary teacher. This will entail:

1. An interview of approximately 60 minutes at the beginning of term 2.
2. Provision of the school development planning documents regarding evaluation of children's progress..
3. The ability to observe some gathered information for evaluation.
4. A further interview of approximately 60 minutes during the third term.

In asking for this information I assure you that all data will be regarded as highly confidential throughout all stages of the study. The published report will not contain anything which may identify the school, the principal, or the teacher in any way. You may, of course, withdraw your participation at any time if you so wish.

If you are willing to participate in this study please sign the consent form and return to me.

If you have any further queries phone me on ----- or my supervisor on -----.

[numbers given]

Yours faithfully,

APPENDIX C.**FORM OF CONSENT FOR BOTH THE PARTICIPANT TEACHER AND THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL.**

Research Title:

Methods of gathering, recording and using information for evaluation of children's progress in pre-primary in the context of the School Development Plan.

This study investigates methods of gathering and recording information for the evaluation of children and children's work currently being used in pre-primary centres, together with the teacher's reasons for these choices, and aims to describe the link, if any, between those methods and the School Development Plan.

Names of the schools and individuals involved in the research project will remain confidential.

FORM OF CONSENT

I, ----- understand what is required for my participation in this study and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this study, with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data may be published with the understanding that I am not identifiable.

Signed -----

Date -----

APPENDIX D.

GUIDE FOR THE FIRST INTERVIEW.

(This was spaced out more for the actual interview).

Question 1

Tell me about how you gather information on the children and children's progress in your class.

Possible answers:³

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| observation | outcome statements |
| subject achievement | monitoring a problem |
| daily log or diary | screening tests |
| activity records | developmental tests |
| anecdotal records | sociograms |
| portfolios | use of audio/visual tapes |
| checklists | collaboration with staff |
| "in the head" | collaboration with parents |
| other | |

.....
.....

Question 2. (take the lead from question 1 on sequence of 2, 2a and 2b.)

Were you required to use any of these methods of gathering or recording information?

yes no

If yes,

Question 2a. Which ones?

.....
.....

³ Possible answers are based on the literature surveyed and on the pilot study responses.

Question 2b. By whom?

Possible answers:

school development group or committee

principal

other staff

other pre-primary staff

other

.....
.....

Question 3.

Do you use observation methods?

yes no

(if yes, proceed to questions 3a - 3e; if no, proceed to question 3f).

Question 3a.

What do you mean by observation?

.....
.....

Question 3b.

What sort of thing do you observe?

Possible answers:

behaviour

academic achievement

interesting situations

developmental progress

language situations

other:

.....
.....

Question 3c.

Do you record your observations?

Possible answers:

no yes sometimes most times always

Question 3d.

How do you record your observations?

Possible answers:

| | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| activity records | child profiles |
| anecdotal notes | daily log or diary |
| checklists | achievement mark |
| rating lists | sociograms |
| other | time interval chart. |

Question 3e.

When do you record an observation?

Possible answers:

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| at the time | at the end of the session |
| straight after the event | at the end of the day |
| other: | |

.....

Question 3f.

Tell me about your reasons for choosing to use (or not to use) observation methods.

.....

Question 4.

Do you make a collection of children's work?

yes no

(if yes proceed to questions 4a - 4e; if no proceed to Question 4f).

Question 4a.

How do you select work for this collection?

Possible answers:

child's best work

child selected

pre-selected work for each child

work that shows individual progression/regression

other:-----

Question 4b.

Do you write anything on the pieces of work?

yes

no

Question 4c.

If yes, what do you write?

Possible answers:

child profile

notes on development

notes on progress/regression

other

Question 4f.

Why did you chose to use (or not use) collections of children's work?

Question 5.

Do you use checklists?

yes

no

(if yes, proceed to Questions 5a - 5d; otherwise proceed to question 5e).

Question 5a.

What do you assess through checklists?

Possible answers:

pieces of work done

participation in specified activities

skills

other

.....
.....

Question 5b.

| | | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-----|----|
| Do you use: | published checklists? | yes | no |
| | lists 'acquired' from 'somewhere'? | yes | no |
| | your own checklists? | yes | no |

Question 5c.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| Do you use rating scales on any of your checklists? | yes | no |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|----|

Question 5d.

Tell me more about

these.....
.....

Question 5e.

What are your reasons for using (not using) checklists and/or rating scales?-

.....
.....

Question 6.

Do you assess children's achievement in specific subject areas? (eg First Steps in literacy)

yes

no

(if yes proceed to 6a - 6c; otherwise proceed to question 6d).

Question 6a.

Which subjects do you measure in this way?

Possible answers:

literacy

science

mathematics

social studies

other--

.....

Question 6b.

How do you test the children for subject achievement?

Possible answers:

formal tests

listening to each child and jotting down

assessment of work pieces

use of assessment material related to a

specific program

other.....

.....

Question 6c.

How do you record children's achievement in these subjects?

Question 6d.

What are your reasons for choosing these methods?

.....

.....

Question 7.

You seem at home with subject-based assessment. Is there any other base or framework you work with? (probes given)

Or

You don't seem very taken with subject-based assessment. Is there a base or framework you work with?

yes

no

Question 7a.

If yes, What other base do you use?

Probes:

developmental domains

areas of development: cognitive,(intellectual), language. Motor/physical,
social/emotional, aesthetic.

.....

Question 7b.

If yes, how do you record the gathered information?

.....
.....

Question 7c.

Why do you use these frameworks?

.....

Question 8

Have you seen the suggested Student Outcome Statements from the national curriculum framework?

yes no

Question 8a.

Have you read through them?

yes no

Question 8b.

Do you use any of these outcome statements in your evaluation of children's work?

yes no

Question 8c.

Do you use outcome statements from any other source? eg. School Development Plan

yes no

Question 8d.

If yes, what do you use?

Question 8e.

How do you record student attainment relating to outcome statements?

.....
.....

Question 8f.

Why do you use (don't use) outcomes/ the outcome statements?

.....

Question 9.

Do you have a use for screening tests?

yes no

Question 9a.

If yes, why do you use them?

.....

Question 10.

Were you given guidelines or suggestions regarding any of the gathering or recording of information?

yes no

Question 10a

If yes, please describe them to me

Question 11.

Were any of the methods of gathering or recording your own choice?

yes no

Question 11a.

If yes, which ones?

.....

Question 12.

Are there any other methods of gathering information on children's progress that you use?

yes no

Question 12a.

If yes, what are those methods?

Possible answers:

time interval recording

collaboration with parents

sociograms

other.....

Question 12b.

Do you sometimes monitor things like:

children's choice of playmates;

children's choice of activities;

children's tendencies to play alone,

alongside, with or in close proximity of an adult?

yes

no

Question 12c.

If yes, how do you do this?

.....

Question 12 d.

If yes, How do you record this information?

.....

Question 13

Do you use a tape recorder or video to help gather information on children's progress?

yes

no

Question 13a.

If yes, tell me more about it.

.....

Question 15f.

If yes, please describe how it influenced you.

.....

Question 16.

Did you 'inherit' any method of gathering or recording information?

yes no

Question 16a. If so, which ones?

.....

Question 17

In which teaching area was your teacher training completed?

| | |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| high school | early childhood education |
| primary school | other |

Question 18.

What qualifications do you have?

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| 3 year teaching certificate | B.Ed |
| Bachelor degree + Graduate Diploma | M.Ed |
| | other |

.....

Question 19. How many years have you been teaching?

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----------|------------|-------------|-------|
| | 1-5 years | 5-10 years | 10-15 years | other |
| high school | | | | |
| primary | | | | |
| Years 1, 2, 3 | | | | |
| pre-primary | | | | |
| other | | | | |

.....

Question 20.

What are your main concerns in the area of evaluation and/or assessment of children and children's progress?

.....

.....

APPENDIX E.

Rating Scale illustrating the most used methods of gathering and recording information on children's progress where 5 measures the most used.

| CASE: | one | two | three | four | five | six |
|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|------|------|-----|
| METHODS OF GATHERING | | | | | | |
| Observation | | | | | | |
| Checklists own | | | | | | |
| Checklists acquired | | | | | | |
| Checklists published | | | | | | |
| Checklists mixed source | | | | | | |
| Rating scale | | | | | | |
| Work samples | | | | | | |
| Collaboration with staff | | | | | | |
| Collaboration with parents | | | | | | |
| Subject-linked assessment | | | | | | |
| Screening tests | | | | | | |
| Use of tape recorder | | | | | | |
| Use of video | | | | | | |
| Use of Student Outcome Statements | | | | | | |
| METHODS OF RECORDING | | | | | | |
| Anecdotal Records | | | | | | |
| Activity Records | | | | | | |
| Daily log | | | | | | |
| Use of continuum | | | | | | |
| In the head | | | | | | |
| Child profiles | | | | | | |
| Charts of progress (domains) | | | | | | |
| Time-interval records | | | | | | |
| Sociograms | | | | | | |
| Other | | | | | | |

APPENDIX. F.**EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE SECOND INTERVIEW.**

In this interview I have two main aims:

1. To explore the relationships between your School Development Plan (SDP) and the particular assessment data already collected.
2. To find out how the assessment data is used.

Each interview will be conducted in three sections, the first consisting of questions relating to the relevant SDP, the second being built on information gained during the first interview and the third searching for the uses of assessment in each class. Thus the first two sections, although following a common pattern, are individually constructed. The third section is common to all classes in the study.

SECTION 1 (taken from the SDP in each school) Examples of questions to teachers include:

Priority English

Performance Indicator. The extent to which students develop their physical and academic skill;

Criteria: Speaking and listening.

Assessment tools:

| | | |
|----------|-----------------------|-----------|
| writing | First Steps continuum | all years |
| spelling | S.A. spelling | Years 2-7 |
| reading | Torch Test | Years 3-7 |

Question 1 Am I right in thinking that speaking and listening are a central focus of your teaching regardless of school priorities?

Question 2 This was to be a priority in 1995 and 1997. Has it also been included this year?

Question 3. Do you record children's progress on the "First Steps" continuum?

Question 4. Is the pre-primary involved in the writing section of the school priority?
(pre-primary does not seem to be indicated on the 'results' of the 1995 analysis)

Question 5a. Are the focus teachers involved in the information gathering techniques in the pre-primary as indicated in the SDP?

5b. If so, in what way?

Question 6. How are the assessments use a. at class level?

b. at school level?

| | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Priority . | Mathematics | Years 3-7 |
| Science | | Years 3-7 |
| Music | | Years 2/4/6 |
| Health | | Years 2/4/6 |

Priority Physical Education

Criterion: Fitness in Years 1-7.

Assessment tools: Australian Schools Fitness Test.

Question 7. Pre-primary is involved in the Perceptual Motor Program (PMP) together with Years 1-3. Is this part of the school priority?

Question 8. You use checklists for PMP. How are they used at:

a. class level?

b. at lower school level?

c. at school level?

Question 9. Is the pre-primary involved in the 'Be Active School Community Project'? (BASC)

- Question 10.** If so: a. what information, if any, do you have to collect on children's progress?
b. How is the information used?

- Question 11.** a. Were you required to do the BASC inservice?
b. If so, did this help in assessment techniques?

Priority. Self esteem and social justice.

Performance indicator: The extent to which students develop awareness of their personal worth.

| <u>Criteria</u> | <u>Assessment instrument</u> | <u>Years</u> |
|-----------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| self esteem | Metro Self Esteem Test | all |
| Aboriginality | Analysis of test results | Aboriginal students and parents |

- Question 12.** Is the pre-primary involved in this priority apart from 'normal' enhancement of self worth in the program?

Question 13. If so, tell me about the Metro test.

- Question 14.** If so, how are the results used: a. at class level?
b. at school level?

- Question 15.** a. Is the pre-primary included in the 'Life Education Center Mobile Program'?
b. If so, does it involve separate assessments? Or
c. Is this an intervention program?

- Question 16.** Are the pre-primary Aboriginal students included in the school priority on aboriginality?
If so, does this require any additional assessment?

Priority. Managing student behaviour. (MSB)

Performance Indicator: The extent to which students show acceptable standards.

| <u>Criteria</u> | <u>Tools</u> | <u>Years</u> |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| social | MSB checklists and data collected weekly for certificates and badges | all |
| property | forms | all |
| environment | partner room | all |
| safety | time out suspension | all |

Question 17. Are the pre-primary children involved in the certificates, badges, use of the “thinking spot”

- a. at class level
- b. at school level

Question 18 If so, what records are kept in respect of these?

SECTION 2 (questions to each teacher arising from the first interview) For exzmples:

Children’s work collections:

You carefully select ahead the pieces of work to go into the collections of work. This selection seems to be based on the skills being focused in your program.

Question 19. How are these collections used:

- a. are they mainly for parents?
- b. are they used as a basis for parent interviews?
- c. are they used for First Steps assessment?
- d. do you use the work samples as back-up for referral purposes?
- e. are they used to help in program planning?
- f. any other way?

Question 20. Do you keep a separate collection of work samples for First Steps assessment?

SECTION 3

Question 21. In your opinion is all of the work you do on assessment actually used?

Question 22. If so, in what way is the assessment used?

- a. your planning;
- b. continuation to Year 1;
- c. parent communication;
- d. referral purposes;
- e. as part of school accountability;
- f. other?

Question 23. If it is not used:

- a. why not;
- b. what is not used;
- c. do you feel that some is to justify your position; (accountability)
- d. anything else?

Question 24. Ideally, how would you like to see assessment used?

Question 25. What do you see as the main purpose of assessment?

Question 26. Do you have any concerns regarding assessment?

Parent Reporting:

Do you send out a written report to parents in the pre-primary?

Do you have to prepare any kind of written report?

If so, Is the format left to you?

Is the format prescribed?

Are there any guidelines or suggestions regarding the report?

Would you normally hold parent interviews following the reports?