

2023

Transforming transitions to school: Using funds of knowledge and identity

Lennie Barblett
Edith Cowan University

Fiona Boylan
Edith Cowan University

Amelia Ruscoe
Edith Cowan University

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10.25958/n8qh-em74

Barblett, L., Boylan, F., & Ruscoe A. (2023). Transforming transitions to school: Using funds of knowledge and identity. Early Childhood Research Group. Edith Cowan University.

<https://doi.org/10.25958/n8qh-em74>

This Report is posted at Research Online.

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Transforming Transitions to School: Using Funds of Knowledge and Identity

'First Day' drawing

" I like to do the monkey bars. I came with Cheska and Thena. I put my banana in the rack... in the basket. My Library books in and my bag in my locker... It was short."
"Me at school."



Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank AISWA, schools, teachers, parents and children who participated in this project and the many research assistants who supported the project during the challenging time of COVID-19. Particular mention is to the ten transition teachers who came on the journey and reimagined practice through design thinking. Thanks to the notosh team for a great collaboration.

The Edith Cowan University research team acknowledges the traditional lands that we traversed during this project. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of these lands and thank you all for your participation. This report is penned on Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar.

Chief Investigators

Professor Lennie Barblett

Dr Fiona Boylan

Dr Amelia Ruscoe

Research Assistants

Karen Nociti

Anita Pickworth

Dr Heather Sparrow

Liz Walker

Dr Leanne Lavina

Jan Batt

Allison Gooch

Amanda Hoffensetz

Claire Kipling

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Introduction

This resource describes a project where ten Western Australian Independent Schools embraced a way of viewing children and their family's transition to school.

Participating teachers came together as a community of practice and engaged in different ways of thinking and investigating accepted practice. Transition practices were affirmed or challenged as teachers were mentored through design-based thinking. Transition ideas were explored focussing on children's funds of knowledge and identity. This resource outlines why transitions are important, considers transitions through a funds of knowledge and identity lens, and describes each school's journey as they re-imagined transitions in this project. Finally, the ideas and strategies that supported the adoption of new practices to affirm a child-centred approach to transition are described.

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Transition to school

Much has been written about the transition to school and the importance of supporting children and families as they connect and engage in ways that sustain and empower all those involved in the transition process. The term "transition" describes the movement of individuals from one state or condition to another. The Victorian Early Learning and Development Framework [VELDF] (Vic Ed Dept, 2016) describe transition as a time of change in which children, families and educators adjust to new roles, identities, expectations, interactions and relationships.

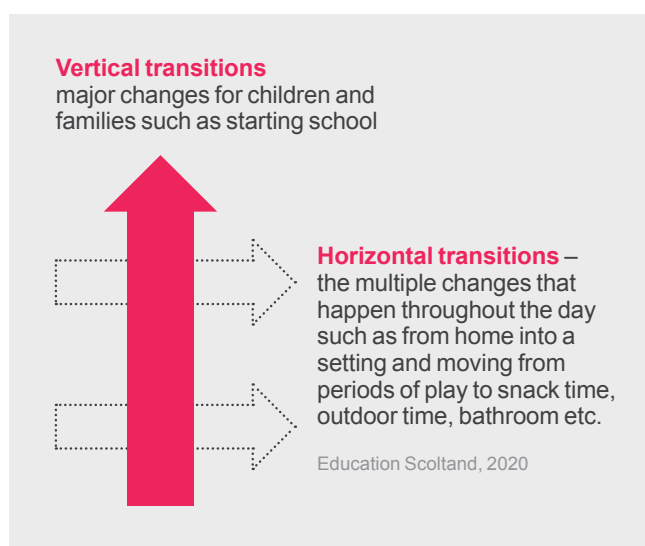
Transitions occur every day as children move to and from different settings daily, across the day, and as they transition from one experience to another. This is a horizontal transition. Some children make multiple transitions by attending early learning settings for part of the day or week and kindergarten for the remainder of the week, or parts of the day. A vertical transition refers to a major change such as starting school. Current thinking of a multiple transition model supports the idea that 'one point transitions' (such as starting school) are not the only significant points of transition in children's lives.

Importance of transitions

Transition experiences (both positive and negative) at a young age are likely to influence children's learning, development and wellbeing at the time of transition and into the future (Dockett & Perry, 2014). Research shows that negative transition experiences are remembered and will influence children's ability to cope with transitions to come (OECD, 2017, p.13).

Children's identities change as they become a member of a new learning community. How children come to think of themselves as a learner is influenced in this new learning community through their experiences and the expectations others hold for them. Transitioning from one place to another often involves significant psychological modifications on the part of the child. This is dependent on the nature and causes of the transition, the degree of change and continuity, and the vulnerability and resilience of the children.

A key to positive transition experiences is respectful relationships where all knowledge and ways of knowing that learners bring are recognised. A discontinuity of experiences across areas of relationships, pedagogy, curriculum, and resources can distort a positive transitional experience. Therefore, discussions of the notion of 'readiness' are required as this often clouds transition debates by narrowly focussing on a pre-determined set of individual skills. Instead, emphasising the importance of knowledge and skills a child already possesses and brings to the educational setting, as well as connections to family and community promotes a positive transition at any stage. Further, continuity of experiences in early transitions is often overlooked as children grapple with learning in a group, different curriculum, movement to suit timetables and introduction to new staff which are dissimilar to previous routines or holidays before term starts.



Vertical and horizontal transitions (Education Scotland, 2020)

Funds of knowledge and funds of identity

Teachers know that each child brings a ‘virtual backpack’ to school, full and overflowing with the accumulated knowledge and experiences learnt before school. Researchers working with Hispanic families in the United States started to think about how teachers might use what children already know and bring to school to empower children and families as worthwhile knowledge holders. In their work, Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) used two terms; Funds of Knowledge (FoK) and Funds of Identity (Fol). Thinking about children and families’ funds has become one of the most effective approaches to strengthening child, family, school and community relationships.

Funds of Knowledge – a term that encompasses the knowledge, skills, and experiences acquired through historical and cultural interactions of an individual in their community and family life and culture through everyday living.

Funds of Identity – are historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for people’s self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding. In other words, the term funds of identity which we are using here denotes a set of resources or box of tools and signs (Esteban-Guitart and Moll, 2014) that are essential for constructing one’s identity and for defining and presenting oneself.

Using FoK and Fol is a strengths-based approach to think about children and their family’s transition into the school community and allows collaboration, communication, culture, and consistency to support a child centred approach to a positive transition. It recognises that children and their families are valuable educational resources. Acknowledging that children and families have FoK, teachers have an understanding that using this fund helps to form children’s Fol as they come to understand themselves as learners in a new setting.

Teachers who use children and family’s funds are more able to develop child-centred curriculum. An understanding of children and family’s funds of knowledge and identity helps teachers select appropriate materials and connect curriculum content to children’s culture, identity, and experience.

Transitions as a tool for change

In Scotland, over the last five years, a project “Transitions as a Tool for Change” (2015-2019) sought to value working together with children and their families to develop “positive relationships, positive continuity, learning, play and wellbeing” (Scottish Transitions as a Tool for Change Project Group, 2019) This project sought to inform and support the further development of local policy and transitions practice. In this work six principles were developed for educators using transitions as a tool for change and to guide thinking in this project.

The six principles are:

- **Aspirations** – families and communities want children’s knowledge to be recognised at times of transition. The holistic notion of children’s development, learning and wellbeing is championed, as well as the importance of continuity in balance with positive change. Educators build relationships with children through attentive listening, acknowledging children’s prior learning and take realistic steps to meet child, family and community aspirations.
- **Expectations** – teachers understand that children and families’ expectations of the transition to school have developed over an extended period and continue until they have developed a feeling of belonging and wellbeing in the new environment. When expectations of families or children are not met there is a risk of children and families feeling isolated or insecure. Teachers and schools develop an effective narrative of transitions for children and families, accentuating joyful anticipation and exciting opportunities.
- **Opportunities** – transitions are seen as a collective responsibility and provide multiple opportunities: championing continuity while celebrating change; dialogue with families and children to allay any fears and anxieties; deepening of relationships with families; developing responsive policies and connected systems to assist successful transitions; and engaging in professional dialogue amongst teams and across schools.
- **Entitlements** – children are entitled to feel safe, secure and connected, and experience continuity of curriculum, pedagogy, play, learning and relationships. Teachers acknowledge that children are active and have agency in their transition and are therefore empowered and entitled to make decisions. Children are entitled to recognition of their culture, language, identity and histories in high quality, equitable learning environments, where getting to know each child and their family is seen as fair and just.
- **Participation** – teachers assist families with the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate appropriately in the transition process. Genuine participation in successful transitions is underpinned by responsive, respectful relationships with families as well as unconditional acceptance that families know their child best.

These elements contribute to the notion of “transitions as a tool for change” as a means for going beyond the way transitions could be transformed, to understanding the potential of transitions themselves to create change. Ten schools agreed to come on this journey and embark on design-based thinking to use transitions as a tool for change.

How we did it

Ten schools signed on to the project that took place across 2020 and 2021.

- Australian Islamic College
- Carmel School
- Geraldton Grammar School
- John Wollaston Anglican Community School
- Lance Holt School
- Living Waters Lutheran College
- Moerlina School
- Perth College
- Perth Montessori
- South Coast Baptist College

The process

Professional learning days

Teachers and some school leaders attended four sessions conducted in 2021 with the view to upskill teachers in contemporary thinking about child centred transitions, engaging families and how to carry out a design thinking process. The ECU early childhood research team led days one and four and notosh led days two and three.

- **Day One (22/3/21)** explored a shared language and understanding of transitions and the terms Funds of Knowledge (FoK) and Funds of Identity (Fol) were introduced. How to investigate and use FoK and Fol in a child centred curriculum were explored. A community of learners for the project was established as teachers worked across and in schools.
- **Day Two (23/3/21)** introduced the design thinking process and prompted teachers and leaders to reflect on their current practice and knowledge of Fol and FoK. The *immersion phase* was introduced, and teachers and leaders learnt how to build a project nest to investigate the different perceptions of the transition over a school term. A project nest is a place where all the relevant stakeholder views and voices were visibly gathered. This was built on return to their schools as shown below.

- **Day Three (14/6/21)** was the beginning of the *ideation phase*, where schools could start to think about how to address identified issues to transform transitions in their school. It concluded with explaining and demonstrating the *prototyping phase* to form ideas of how they would transform their transitions in 2022. Feedback on their initial ideas was gained from other schools. The ECU team shared strategies for collecting data from children and educators were guided in how to use their data regarding children's Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity to inform the changes.
- **Day Four: (25/10/21)** Further information to *disrupt* educator's thinking about concepts such as continuity and involvement versus engagement was presented. Each school delivered a small presentation to share their ideas for transforming their transitions. Schools brought along their work on the Design Principles Mapping Grids to share and aligned them with the National Quality Standard.

Interim coaching sessions

Throughout the project the schools engaged in online coaching sessions with notosh personnel to support the design thinking process. These sessions were based on the G.R.O.W coaching model, which initially sought to understand the participant's goal/s (G) for the session. Once a goal was established the participant described their current reality (R) in relation to achieving that goal. The coach and participant then discussed the possible options (O) available to drive them closer to their goal and finally, actionable steps were decided upon that the participant would do (W). This model was goal oriented and follows a similar logic to that of the design thinking process.

Observations of the first days of school

In the first week of school in 2021 initial observations of transitions in one early childhood year level in the ten schools were gathered by ECU's Research Assistants over two days. In 2022 observations were carried out in the same settings and year levels. In both observation periods all researchers used an observation protocol and a checklist to collect documentation.



A project nest gathering multiple stakeholders views of transition at one school.

Stakeholder interviews

Stakeholder interviews were conducted with teachers of the focus year level, and principals/leaders and parents of transitioning children to gather their perceptions of the transition experience. Children's perceptions of the transition were also gathered using dialogic drawing in 2021 and 2022 (Ruscoe, 2022). This is a specific method where the teacher engages in dialogue with the child as they draw a response to a conversation prompt. A digital resource explaining the method was provided for the teachers alongside conversations prompts to use with the children.

Research Team visits to schools

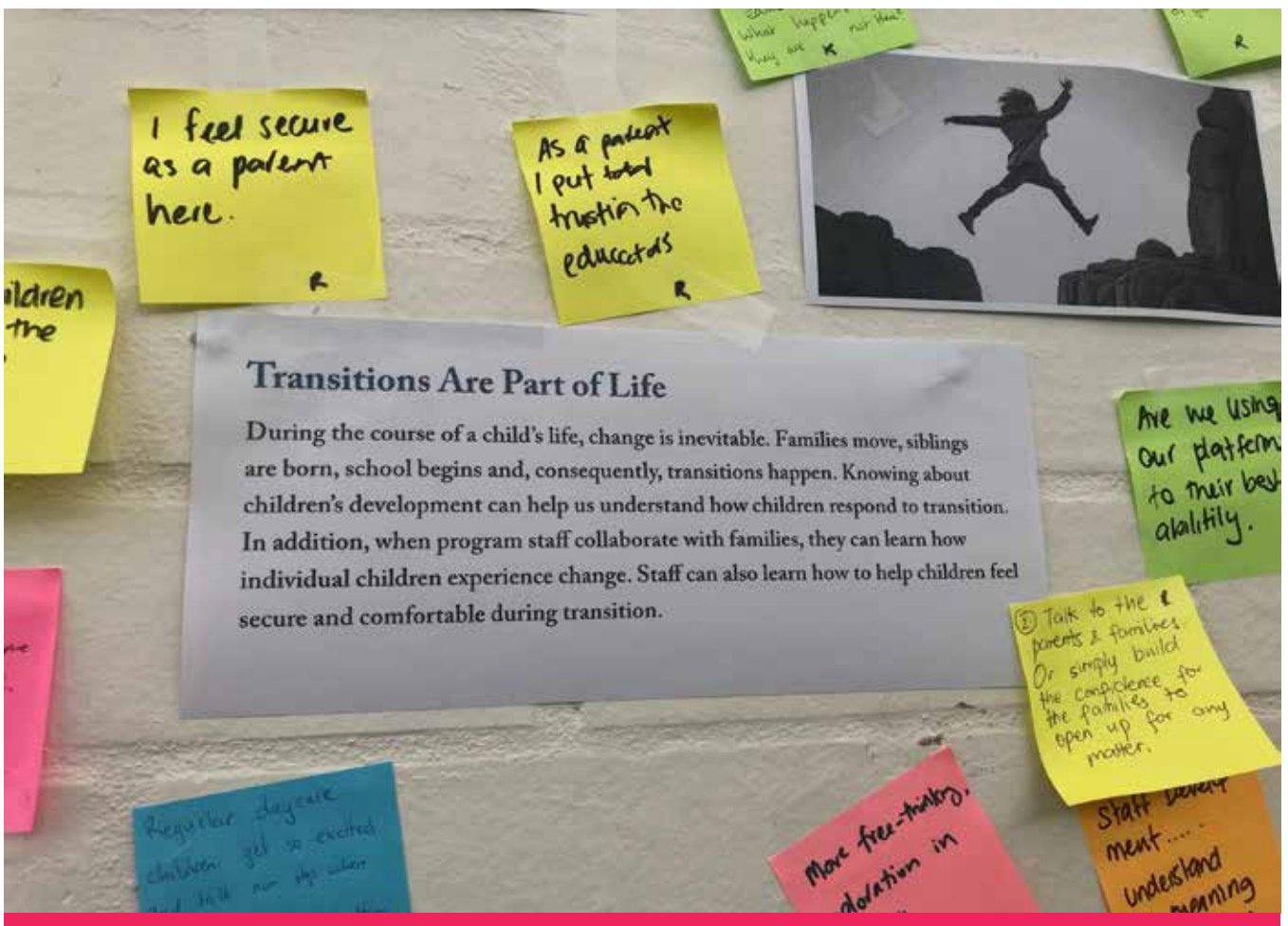
During June 2021, the ECU Chief Investigators visited each school and met with teachers and leaders to present the analysis of the research data collected in the first days of school. This analysis was presented as a 'talking point' report to share the findings of the observations and interviews. Factors that sustained and factors that disrupted the transition were presented to support schools to identify the changes to transitions focusing on children's Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity.

Developing and using the design principles

Before the last professional learning day ECU and notosh developed three design principles based on the findings of the observations, interviews and coaching sessions. The intent was to provide schools with areas of focus as they planned to transform the transition. To assist schools with prototyping their transition ideas, a mapping grid was developed by ECU. The schools filled in the mapping grid against each principle to plan for changes to transitions for 2022. They outlined the strategies they would use to address each principle, a timeline, and how they would measure the impact of the changes.

Interviews with notosh personnel

Interviews were conducted with notosh at the end of 2021 to gather data about the implementation of design thinking and the application to transforming transitions in schools.



Project nests evolved across the school term to gather perceptions of parents and school staff over time.

What we found

In a design-based thinking process a usual output is a set of design principles. Design principles can be thought of as 'rules of thumb' which reflect theoretical understandings to guide teachers' practice as they transformed the transition. We developed three design principles as follows:

Design principles



'Belonging' and 'being' to support strong connections

- Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of identity and knowledge: invest in the 'virtual backpacks' children bring through intentional planning.
- Respect the child's right to 'be' a child: Affirm each child's identity and sense of safety.
- Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connection between children, families, educators, school, and community.



A shared vision for all stakeholders

- Use clear, consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families, and professional colleagues.
- Collaboratively design a transparent blueprint of the 'transition game plan' that is culturally responsive to children, families and respects the values of the school's ethos.



Leadership for powerful transitions

- Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.
- Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.
- Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

The following stories are written from information gathered from all sources of data by the research team and edited and affirmed by the teachers and school leaders. Each story reflects the individual journey of each school.

John Wollaston Anglican Community School

School context

John Wollaston, founded in 1989, is a Pre-Kindergarten to Year 12 co-educational Anglican School located approximately 26 kilometres southeast of the Perth CBD, in the foothills of the Darling Range. The school's enrolment has approximately 1100 students in Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary programs. Of these students, 26% identify with a language background other than English. To prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century the school describes the teaching of enriching programs, Christian principles and the positive influence of staff that assist students to develop as inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people, lifelong learners, and global citizens. The Little Wollies program caters for Pre-Kindergarten children who have turned three before June 30th of the year of enrolment. Currently, the Little Wollies program is run in spaces shared with the Kindergarten program.

Transition point

Pre-Kindergarten Context

The classroom for Pre-Kindergarten has been designed to stimulate, engage, and challenge the curious minds of young students, allowing them to develop at their own pace and to their full potential. The Little Wollies timetable is offered as a one day a week or two day a week program running from 8.45am-2.45pm. Children start on the first day of term according to the day/s of their attendance. New enrolments are accepted from families with children who have turned three by 30 June. The room is a shared space with a Kindergarten class. Staff collaborate to ensure the use of shared resources is effective for both classes using the rooms. The use of indoor and outdoor spaces is responsive to students throughout the day. The class teacher is supported by an Education Assistant with additional staff provided in the first week for children who

may require additional support. Further to this, the Early Years Coordinator provides ongoing support on a need's basis throughout the year. The program involves structured routines for arrival, transitions, morning tea, mat session and dismissal and child directed play-based activities for inside and outside play where children choose what they would like to do. A play-based curriculum responsive to children's interests and capabilities includes learning centre activities such as drawing, art activities, construction, blocks, books, and a home corner.

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

Reflecting upon the project's three Design Principles for transitions, the school drew primarily upon all three principles with the first principle: 'Belonging' and 'being' to support strong connections, a focus to drive changes to transform the transition. The changes stem from a desire to reflect the child's right to be a child, to cultivate respectful and responsive relationships with families through more collaborative communication processes and to be more responsive to each child's FoK and FoI through planning. These foci were central to decisions made throughout the project.

Teacher's voice – Funds of Knowledge (FoK) and Funds of Identity (FoI)

"The three principles instantly gave me a filter to look at everything and ask what are my actual priorities? In terms of funds of knowledge, that then helps you evaluate all the information coming in and to filter what you actually want to collect. What's going to be valuable from my perspective, the families and the child's? What do I value? And it helped in shifting the focus away from me as the educator in the room back to the children."



Indoor and outdoor spaces were designed to stimulate, engage and challenge the curious minds of children.

Design Principle 1: ‘Belonging’ and ‘being’ to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of identity and knowledge: Invest in the ‘virtual backpacks’ children bring through intentional planning.

The Transforming Transitions project challenged the school to view transitions from multiple stakeholders’ perspectives and to reconsider children’s FoK and FoI as key considerations to reimagine the transition. A multifaceted approach was used to welcome families to the school and prepare for their child starting at Little Wollies. However, during the project, the staff shifted their thinking away from being process oriented to child oriented. Processes for gathering information about families and children were in place however the information was not used to prepare for transitions, nor did it focus on children’s FoK and FoI. Additionally, information gathered was thought to be at a surface level with more information about the child and families required to inform and support the transition. For example, at the interview with the child and parents, staff only asked about the language spoken at home and the school identified that more information was needed to gather children’s FoK and FoI. Collecting information about children and families was an ongoing process with family photos also requested. Cultural questions were raised as staff viewed these and conversations with parents and further research by staff to develop their knowledge of different cultural practices to build their understanding of children’s funds of knowledge and identity. The teacher focused more on matching planned curriculum with emergent curriculum with an emergent curriculum gradually became the more prominent and most successful pedagogy. The teacher thought about “How can we bring FoI and FoK information into the classroom and how much do parents want to divulge? We get so focused on curriculum and forget this aspect.” Whilst the school celebrated these successful changes further questions arose such as “What more can we do to gather families’ cultural backgrounds. How can we make families culturally included?” One parent commented that information about children and their families “is very important for teachers to have for the transition.” Another parent commented that “We went to three different schools before enrolling him, but this school was totally different to the other 3 schools. We chose this school because it feels like they focus more on the kids.”

Respect the child’s right to ‘be’ a child: Affirm each child’s identity and sense of safety.

Respecting the child’s right to be a child was reflected in a shift in the teacher’s mindset to be more flexible in the expectations of children and to consider children’s perspectives during transitions, for example, having flexibility in the timetable. When one child became very unsettled because of the heat, the decision was made to bring all children inside. The teacher commented that “Letting go of structural routines and following the children’s lead resulted

in more flow and helped to maintain a calmer atmosphere.” Allowing parents of unsettled children to stay longer if needed also led to a “more settled and calmer atmosphere” according to the teacher. Experiences on the first day of school offered a play-based curriculum responsive to student needs with the teacher and Education Assistant circulating to join in with children’s play and have discussions with children to form relationships. A calm, positive, relaxed atmosphere was evident. Children were given free choice of activities with the teacher making suggestions of additional materials that could be added in response to children’s needs and interests. For example, the teacher was heard to say “I think we have some dinosaurs to put into that home you have built. Would you like me to find some?”

The teacher found stepping back to consider the needs and interests of the child rather than focusing on preparing them for school helped her to respect the child’s right to be a child. For example, one parent commented that her child is often hungry and was a grazer at home. As soon as the parent left, the child went to get their lunch box. The teacher suggested that the child had a drink of water first, but the child persisted and went back to the lunch box. In response to the child’s needs, the teacher opened the lunch box up and sat the child in a chair so that she could have a snack. The child was satisfied and went off to play. The teacher reflected, “I changed my perception that I have to continue if something doesn’t work. I asked myself what is the child trying to tell me?” It was evident that children felt a sense of safety as they were observed not wanting to leave at the end of the sessions and were excited to return the next day.

Day one and two transition processes were found to have a rushed feeling in 2021 with all children attending for a full day on day two. This limited the time of the teacher and Education Assistant to get to know the children and families and to build respectful relationships to strengthen belonging. A shift in thinking from ensuring ‘children are ready for school’ to the ‘school being ready for children’ was adopted in 2022 to transform the transition. On day two, children and families were allocated a half-day session where half the class attended on their own with parents invited to leave once their child was settled. Having the children attend in smaller groups with a staggered start enabled the teacher to be more responsive to the children and to get to know them more on an individual level. The teacher was also able to spend more time speaking with and reassuring parents. As the teacher moved around the room a parent spoke to the teacher about their child’s toilet training. The teacher replied, “Please do not concern yourselves as we have strategies that we will put into place, so let us look at what we can do.” It was arranged with the parent to leave a bag with a change of clothes in the adult’s kitchen out of view from children and other adults. The parent at the end of the discussion left smiling, and laughing, and thanked the teacher.

Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connections between children, families, educators, school, and community.

Connecting with all parents including those who speak languages other than English and may be hesitant about attending orientation provided opportunities for exploration to cultivate respectful relationships. Enrolment and orientation processes were reimagined to be more child driven rather than process driven. A 'Welcome to Little Wollies' flyer developed for 2022 provided an outline of the transition opportunities for families. A Parent Orientation Workshop 'Coffee Catch up' held at the end of 2021, a 'Play Date' held just before school started, a drop in morning or afternoon on the first day where parents stayed, and a flexible staggered start were offered and reflected significant changes to the transition. The focus was on cultivating respect with parents rather than 'talking at' parents to build responsive relationships and recognising the capabilities of three-year-old children in a new setting. The teacher commented that the move to "smaller groups were less overwhelming for the children and allowed myself and the Education Assistant to move around the room to speak with children and parents." One parent had an interpreter, and the teacher was able to spend time reassuring the mother about transition routines and procedures through the interpreter. The teacher commented that her focus was to "develop a sense of belonging, affirm each child as a person and help them to feel safe."

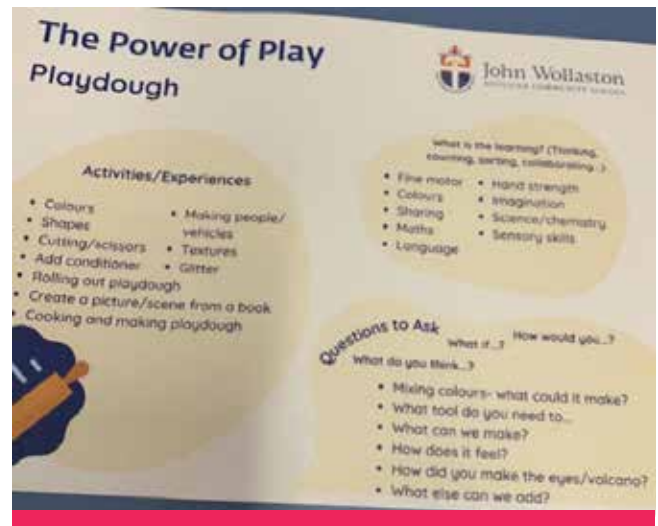
The school identified the need to clearly communicate their thinking behind the staggered start to parents. During the Orientation Workshop the teacher explained to parents "This is a transition process. It (the staggered start) will take a couple of weeks. You have these opportunities where you're coming in and you're spending time with your kids so that they feel safe and secure, and they familiarise themselves in this environment with you as their trusted adult while they get to know us." Parents were accepting with the teacher commenting that there were no complaints from parents about the process.

Parents were also provided with a booklet on the first day outlining some of the inside activities which children and parents could complete. This was seen to provide direction and connection to parents and children on the first day.

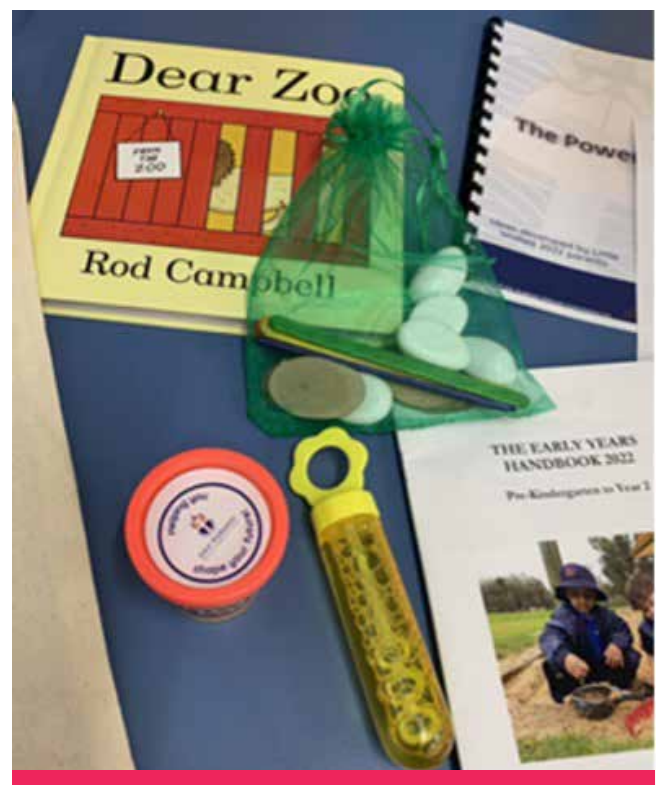
Communicating with parents the power of learning through play was identified by the school as important to create a shared vision of the intended teaching program and build connections with families. The school's action plan during the project identified they would 'Play up the power of play'.

To do this the children and families were given a Little Wollies Pack consisting of a canvas bag with pamphlets and a booklet 'The Power of Play'. The 'Power of Play' booklet was written by parents during the Orientation Workshop. Accompanying the booklet was a book for children, playdough, and bubbles. The booklet outlined activities that

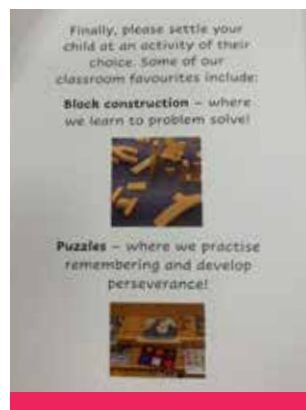
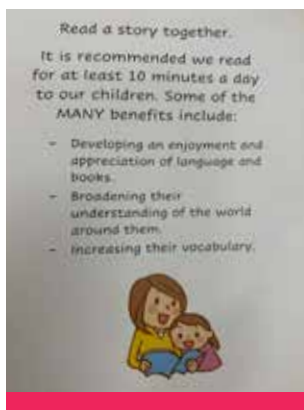
parents could complete with children using the materials, questions that could be asked as parents engaged in the experiences with their children and the learning that occurs during that playful activity. Parents believe that effective relationships have been forged as one parent said, "This school feels like they focus more on the children, and we feel very safe and comfortable sending him there."



Example of a page from the Power of Play booklet created by parents at the Orientation Workshop.



Items included in the bag parents receive at the Orientation Workshop/Play Date.



Booklet provided to parents on the first day to help orient and support their children to feel connected and familiar with the environment.

Design Principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear, consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families, and professional colleagues.

The school recognised that having a clear and consistent communication strategy valuing the sharing of ideas was important to foster higher levels of engagement and participation with families, children, and colleagues. The teacher echoed this sentiment when she said, “Term 1 at Little Wollies is all about relationships, routines and learning to share our interests. The information we collect helps us ensure your children feel safe, secure, and excited to come to Little Wollies each week.”

Parents are first informed of the transition process in the year prior with an orientation, workshop style ‘Coffee Catch Up’ just for parents. Rather than staff talking at parents, a collaborative approach was used which recognised parents as their child’s first teacher. Held in the School’s Chalk Café (run by senior students), the Orientation Workshop provided parents with an opportunity to meet key staff and learn about the school and the transition process. With the overall goal of connecting families and school with a clear plan and shared understanding, the key principles underpinning this

session were that parent questions were to drive the content, and each activity must provide an opportunity for parents to connect and feel valued. The session commenced with parents being invited to ask questions on a Q&A board by writing a question on post-it notes. These questions were addressed and information about what it means to be three years old was shared to help parents understand children’s needs. To encourage participation, parents received stickers for each task they completed to win a school hat for their child. During the session, parents were given a Little Wollies bag which contained a children’s book, bubble mixture, loose parts, and playdough. When introducing the bag, parents collaborated to brainstorm how to use these materials to extend children’s learning through play with their children. Their ideas were shared and then collated to create ‘The Power of Play’ booklet. A copy of the booklet was provided at the play date that followed at the beginning of the year. The school shared with parents the heavy cognitive and emotional load for children engaging in a new environment and explained the benefits of a staggered start. They also received a social story about the teachers and a day at Little Wollies to read to the children in the lead up to the start of school. Parents commented to the staff how much they enjoyed the Orientation Workshop. Attendance rates to this event were the highest they have ever been with parents connecting for play dates over the school holidays. A parent commented that they found the information “really helpful.”

A play date was held just before school started in 2022 where children engaged in indoor and outdoor play of their choice whilst informal conversations between the parents, teacher and Education Assistant allowed for questions to be answered. Parents appreciated this opportunity to attend the school where they did not have to face traffic congestion and parking issues. Accessibility of information for all families including EAL/D families was considered to ensure all families were well informed of transition processes. One parent had an interpreter with her on the first day and the teacher spent time reassuring the mother through the interpreter about routines and procedures. The teacher commented, “Everything I do is about making the children feel safe, secure, wanting to be here so communicating that clearly is important.”

Collaboratively design a transparent blueprint of the ‘transition game plan’ that is culturally responsive to children, families and respects the values of the school’s ethos.

A transition blueprint was developed to ensure that all stakeholders were clear on events and processes occurring to facilitate children’s and families transition to the school. Crucial in the development of the new blueprint was the inclusion and clarity around the ‘why’. For each step in the process, a succinct explanation of purpose prefaced the ‘what’. Two new handouts were developed for parents and given out at the Orientation Workshop morning. The first handout outlined the transition steps – step one for the ‘grown ups’, step two for the kids, step three getting started and step four outlined ongoing support. The second handout provided a summary of key dates and times so parents could clearly see the progression of the transition and the support offered. Transition events also explored opportunities to gather important knowledge or information from parents/caregivers to be used in planning and preparation for the start of the school year. Parents appreciated that they got to share information about their child’s routines and home life and felt it was very useful for teachers to have this information. One parent commented “I got to fill in a questionnaire about my child and passed it on to the school.”

Once school started the parents also appreciated the pictures and stories that were sent home to describe the day. A parent commented, “... we got stories and pictures sent to us about what the children were doing.” The distance in time between children only attending two days per week was identified as a challenge for the children with parents commenting “it makes it difficult to form routines.” The teacher developed a social story to assist with this which was very popular with children and families and will be digitalised next year.

WELCOME TO Little Wollies

We are so pleased you have accepted a place in our Little Wollies program for 2022. Whether you are an existing family here at John Wollaston or new to our community, we look forward to working with you to ensure a smooth transition into school for our newest Little Wollies.

Every child's journey to Little Wollies is very different. We hope the following opportunities will help develop a sense of belonging, affirm your child as a person and help them to feel safe as they take this next step in their journey. Our new transition steps for Little Wollies have been designed around the needs of children and the importance of a good beginning.

- 'One for the grown-ups'**
We know that when families and educators work together with a clear plan and shared understanding, we can best support our young people. In order to do this, we are holding a Little Wollies Parent Orientation Morning. This will be an excellent opportunity for parents to meet key staff and talk through information for the start of 2022. It is also a great chance to meet and mingle with other parents. There will be a special pack to collect on the day too. Sorry, this event is just for the grown-ups! Please bring all your questions as there will be ample time for Q&A.
- 'One for the kids!'**
Once the start of the school year gets closer, it is important that our new Little Wollies have a chance to explore the environment, connect with staff and other children and leave a little something that connects them to the space for when they return. To help with this, we are holding a Play Date for Little Wollies and their families. Come along and play in the outdoor space, investigate the classrooms and let your Little Wollie feel excited about this next step!
- Getting Started**
Beginning school with a full class for a full day can be overwhelming for our Little Wollies, which is why we have a staggered start to the year. Day One, on Thursday 3 February, is Drop-in Day. Each family will be allocated a session on this day to attend. Children will arrive at their class and start to learn about the daily routine with a parent or trusted adult there to help them. Whilst your child plays, you will have a chance to talk with the teacher and discuss any individual needs. Our talented Education Assistants will be there to help supervise the play!
On Day Two of Week 1, Friday 4 February, the class will be divided into two groups to attend either an AM or PM session where parents drop and leave their child. With a smaller number of children, managing any separation challenges becomes more manageable. Our goal is that each Little Wollie is afforded the best chance for a positive start.
From Week 2 onwards, students will attend for the full days from 8:45am – 2:45pm. There is some flexibility at this point – if your Little Wollie is finding school exhausting, you can liaise with the teacher for a lunch time pick up until they are ready for full days.
- Ongoing Support and Information**
Keep an eye out for invitations to our Chalk Café Parent Mornings that run throughout the year. Some of the 'hot topics' in Early Childhood Education will be covered and we would also love to hear from families if there's something you'd like to talk about! It is also a great opportunity to mingle with other John Wollaston families.

I look forward to welcoming you and your child to Little Wollies in 2022.

Kind regards,
Tracey Rogers
Tracey Rogers | HEAD OF PRIMARY

Flyer created by the school to map out the transition process for families.

Design Principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

The school identified that focusing their attention on the transition as a tool for change would enhance early childhood education and long-term positive outcomes for children and families. Whilst working through the project, the school developed an action plan with a mission statement “Young children and their families are welcomed, informed and empowered to become active members of the John Wollaston Community and build a sense of belonging”. This had three core pillars for change:

1. Play up the power of play,
2. Communicate clearly and consistently and,
3. ‘Let’s be 3!’

This action plan underpinned the changes the school made to the transition and reflected the core design principles developed for all schools. Enrolment processes were reviewed as part of this plan with enrolment questions and information collected examined as the teacher reflected, “do we ask the right questions about children and families.” Also considered were what key things are needed for the teacher to know immediately e.g., sickness, siblings, medical conditions, day care attendance. The staff demonstrated an open mindset for change to ensure that all ideas to transform the transition were considered. The leader commented, “No one was wedded to what we were doing so there was no ego or investment or emotional attachment to what we were already doing.”

This project had the support of the leadership team as a driver of the transition project. Two leadership team members attended all the project sessions and were involved in all aspects of the change process to transform the transition. One leader commented “The project brought a deeper understanding of the why. It made us think about all transitions in the school. We are now reflecting on transitions for other year levels.” The transitions project was reflected in the school’s strategic plan as a core focus of the early childhood team.

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

The school was committed to leading and supporting staff involved in the transition, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels. The support from the leadership team allowed the teacher freedom to think creatively about possible strategies to ensure that children’s FoK and FoI were used to be visibly responsive to each child. The teacher commented, “Being given the freedom to do what is best for children has helped me relax and breathe and

made and me feel more comfortable.” The leader described how “The project brought deeper understanding of the why so that we reconsidered why we do what we do.”

The leadership team made an intentional decision to provide stability to the staff in the Little Wollies Pre-Kindergarten class seeing this as an opportunity for the teacher and Education Assistant to further build on their working relationship and to provide stability for families with siblings attending. It was noted that the Education Assistant has been working at the school for many years and knows many of the families with siblings passing through the Pre-Kindergarten programme. Her expertise was recognised as this stability of staff enabled conversations between the Education Assistant and the teacher to support children and families during the transition. In addition to this, the Early Years Coordinator was placed in the Little Wollies classroom demonstrating a commitment to supporting the teacher, children, and families for the first few days of the transition.

During the project, the school further enhanced relationships with local Early Learning Centres recognising the knowledge and expertise they have of the children transitioning into the Pre-Kindergarten. If parents gave permission, the school spoke to the ELC the child had attended prior to the start of Little Wollies to gather information about how the child manages in the ELC environment. The leader commented that “We need to consider if this becomes standard practice as there were some lovely conversations and some children have shared care between ELC and Little Wollies.”

Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

During the project, the school adapted and innovated to respond to changing priorities of all stakeholders. In 2021 a parent information night, parent information pack and open morning were embedded practices to support the transition into the school. However, the challenge of catering for the transition of 14 three-year-old children who attended all day on the second day in 2021 prompted the school to adapt and innovate to respond to the needs of all stakeholders. The project shifted the mindset of the teacher and leaders to be more child and family focused rather than preparing the child for school. Significant changes included:

- The creation of two new handouts for parents to outline the transition journey
- An Orientation Workshop for parents that was collaborative
- A half day play date for children and families
- A drop-in day on Day One
- A staggered start with manageable smaller groups
- Seeking parent feedback after each event
- Exploration of opportunities to gather important knowledge or information from parents/caregivers during all events.

The school identified a need to collect information about children and families earlier to ensure they include children's and families' FoK and FoI in their planning for transitions. In 2021 a questionnaire was sent home in the first few weeks of school to ask about the child's strengths/interests, fears/dislikes and how to calm them, toileting, sleeping, during the day and food via a paper survey. Changes in 2022 meant the information was gathered earlier before children started via an online parent communication platform with questions reviewed to shorten the survey. More in-depth information was provided by families using this process. This enabled the teacher to analyse the data prior to the start of school, share the information with other staff in the room and use it to inform planning and teaching ensuring the program reflected children's FoK and FoI. Parents appreciated the opportunity to share information about their family and child to support the transition.

Teacher's voice – what did they see differently

"I think the transitions are less rigid now and more flux whereas beforehand my mindset wasn't as flexible."

Leader's Voice

"The project made us think about all transitions in school. We are now reflecting on transitions for other year levels."

Conclusion

The transitions project was embraced wholeheartedly by the school resulting in positive changes to the way the school viewed and transformed the transition. An open mindset was evident where ideas were brainstormed and evaluated from multiple stakeholder perspectives leading to the development of a strategic action plan aligned with the Transitions Project core design principles. Changes to enrolment processes, orientation events, collection of information about children and families, parent information packs, and a staggered start have prioritised the schools desire to ensure young children and their families are welcomed, informed, and empowered to become active members of the school community and build a sense of belonging. Priorities identified by the school moving forward include striving to help families feel more culturally included.



Examples of activities set up in the learning environment based on children's interests.

Moerlina School

School Context

Moerlina is an independent primary school, Pre-Kindergarten to Year 6, that prides itself on a culture of collaboration, support and mutual respect. A pedagogical orientation for play, exploration of the natural world and learning that is meaningful is highly valued. The school ethos promotes a sense of belonging and security for children, so they feel safe to challenge themselves and take risks in their learning. Outdoor learning and offsite excursions assist exploration of new places and new experiences relevant to what they are learning about, to expand their knowledge and understanding and make sense of the world.

Transition Point

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten

The transition point from this project was Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten, which are combined. The Principal, Kindergarten Teacher and parents all took part in the project. The Pre-Kindergarten children can start as they turn three, so the class grows gradually through the year. Children can attend a half or whole day, across any of the Kindergarten program days, increasing their time as they are ready. The Kindergarten program runs for 3 full days each week and is guided by the children's interests, the Early Years Learning Framework and the WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines. Where places are available, children from other Kindergartens may attend part-time. It also borrows from early childhood philosophical approaches such as Reggio Emilia and Montessori. Further, the program supports child-led and multi-age learning.



Outdoor environments are designed to assist exploration and help children become 'Nature's Adventurers'.

Our Story

In the Pre-Kindergarten children can attend once they turn three, so the group can be small at the beginning of the year. They are incorporated into a multi-age class with the Kindergarten children. The Principal and the Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten teacher, who is also the Early Years Learning Co-ordinator, said they joined in the Transition project so they could reflect on and improve what they do to ensure transitions were effective for very young children and their families. They described wanting to find out more to improve practices and join in a project where they were collecting opinions and using data to inform what they did.

Children enrolled in Pre-Kindy are invited to stay for a half day and attend full days when the staff, families and often the child, deem they are ready. In the transition process used before the project, the teacher would post a letter addressed to the child before the start of the year, describing how they are looking forward to seeing them soon. Families received two emails – one asking for a family photo and a second to describe what to bring, what to expect on arrival and the start and finish times of the sessions.

Teacher's voice – Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity

Are these helpful terms?

Answer: "Yes, I think it comes down to understanding funds of knowledge and funds of identity and how vital these are. We always understood that it was important. But now, we understand that it should be at the forefront of what we do."

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

Reflecting upon the project's three Design Principles for transitions, the school drew primarily upon all three principles with a core focus on being more child centred to enable children to be the author of their transition experience with support from the educators as they drew on children's FoK and FoI.



Design principle 1: Being and belonging to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of knowledge and identity: invest in the 'virtual back packs' children bring through intentional planning.

The teacher explained a parent questionnaire is usually completed at the time of enrolment. The Early Learners questionnaire asked questions such as, "Does your family have any cultural/religious beliefs that we would benefit from understanding and/or may be celebrated within our class?" However, once involved in the project and learning more about children's FoK and FoI, the teacher said she rethought this strategy. She reported, "Previously a survey was sent out and in retrospect I thought I don't really look at these. It was quite a tedious piece of paper that they used to have to fill out and ... unless there was some already flagged issues... it was really quite pointless." In 2022, a new strategy, driven by the idea that the child should be the author of their own story, centred on posters about themselves. The Principal noted the posters had brought about a connection between home and school and enabled staff to gather information about the children's FoK and FoI in response to what had been presented in professional development for the transitions project. The parents were given the chance to share about their child and family but in a simpler, open-ended form. This became more of an invitation of what would you like us to know about you, your family, and your child.

Teacher's voice

"We still wanted the parent to share information about their child, but we also wanted to give the child the opportunity to be the author of their own story. I gave each family a large piece of card and asked the children if they could make me a poster about them, the intent was to be child led, and give us a look into what the child values, their interests, and important things in their lives. I explained there were no rules to the poster, except I asked for each poster to have the child's name on it ... Families were invited to drop off their poster before school started, so they could be up on the wall when the child arrived for their first day, but this was up to the individual."

The teacher referred to the posters frequently, for example when greeting a child and their family, and pointed out the displayed posters to the children, prompting them to explain some of the things depicted. The posters were described as a tool to assist the child in developing a sense of belonging in the setting.

The way in which the environment was set up and the learning experiences provided, stemmed from the information from orientation, the posters, information parents had shared and knowledge that was already known about children who had older siblings in the school. For example, the teacher learned that one child had an interest in dinosaurs from their poster, and a diorama in the block corner had been prepared. While the teacher said she had always tried to use children's interests she said she had never previously pointed this out to children to make it apparent that she knew things about them.



Posters created by families displayed for the first day of school.



Diorama set up in the block corner in response to information collected from a poster.

Teacher's voice

"I've always set up our environment using the information I already had about the children's likes and interests. This year, I explicitly explained why I set the environment out that way, so they knew I had them in mind and I had purposely put items out because I knew they enjoyed it."

For another child who had shown an interest in the cars and trucks on the orientation day, the teacher described, "I've got little cars inside, and outside under our verandah we have the diggers and trucks, so he could have that connection as soon as he arrived." Another example of connecting to and using children's FoK and FoI was for a child who had "just moved here from Holland. We have Dutch on the welcome sign, as well as other languages."

One of the parents described completing the poster across the school break. She said,

Parent's voice

"(child's name) was asked to do a special poster about himself. He and I worked on that together in the holidays. And that was placed on the wall so when the children arrived at school, they were able to see themselves but also see their other classmates. Photos and pictures and talk about things of interest so (child's name) enjoyed doing that and have some of his personality, if you like, in the room before he started."

While another parent described their child's experience in making the poster, when she said, "They had to create an 'All About Me' poster and she really enjoyed doing that and could do whatever she wanted to do with that."

The information gathered was not only used in the first few weeks but throughout the year. In the previous year, a family from the United States celebrated "Thanksgiving" and the teacher described how they had used that information to hold a shared Thanksgiving feast, "through this we discovered three or four families celebrated this holiday as well."

This experience prompted the teacher to consider how she might incorporate FoI and FoK through the year, rather than just in the first few weeks.

Family photos in frames decorated by the children were also used as a strategy to connect children's FoK and FoI. The photos were used as a reference point in conversations by the staff who had knowledge of families and linked to their knowledge of children's past experiences. For example, children were asked about their holidays at Rottneest during the mat session and family members were discussed also at this time. The photos were displayed on the window ledge above the book corner lounge.

Respect the child's right to 'be' a child: Affirm each child's identity and sense of safety.

The teacher had a firm belief about children's sense of safety in the transition process. The children in this setting could choose to be indoors or outdoors and while mat session attendance was encouraged it was not mandatory. For some of the very young children in Pre-Kindy, sitting and listening was a difficult task and options were given. For example, when the bells heralded story time on the mat, while children were encouraged to pack up and join some continued to play in the home corner. The teacher said "Guess what I just realised? It's time for a story but you're all happy doing what you're doing." Yet some children say, "Can I have a story?" While other children said they "don't want one." The teacher and assistant had communicated this to each other before the start of the day. The teacher said to the assistant, "we are not going to push (child name) or (child name) to join the group on the mat if they don't want to." This approach was fully supported by parents who praised the autonomy given to children across the transition. One parent shared, "it's been a really positive experience for her. The autonomy and stuff that they do with the kids I think is fantastic. And the way she gets there and wants to do things straight away and they sort of rearrange things so that she can do it." Another parent echoed the same sentiments when she said, "It's not so structured and rigid... it is one of the reasons we chose this again this year – he is able to speak for himself, he can choose, not forced or controlled."

Teacher's voice

"If children feel safe, happy, and recognised, I think they are the main things, and know they're also being listened to so. Making sure that it's (the transition) as calm as it can be, and if that needs to be very slow and steady, then we'll do it slow and steady. Whatever is the best for each individual child."

One of the major changes the teacher described was the use of specialist teachers. In re-thinking transitions the staff had discussed children's sense of safety and concluded that moving to a new location with new adults was a challenge to this. In response, the teacher did not use specialists for the first two weeks to allow the children time to settle into the Kindergarten environment, opting to introduce them to different spaces in the school later. However, she did invite the musical specialist, who some of the children had met the year before, to come in as music takes place in the Kindergarten setting, and the teacher and teacher assistant stayed and took part in the session with the children.

The teacher said the children could opt in or out and that she would join the group rather than taking allocated time outside of the class (DOTT: duties other than teaching). It was also decided that other parts of the early years program such as “Nature’s Adventurers”, where the class would visit close by wilderness spaces, would be gradually introduced, when the children appeared ready to explore.

Treating children as individuals and understanding that what might work for one child may not work for others was an underlying philosophical belief of the school. The teacher described the needs of particular children requiring adjustments, for example, during group mat times. The very young age of many of the children prompted an empathetic approach by staff to separation anxiety on entry. The teacher said, “We set up a story table using the book ‘Owl Babies’”. By reading and role playing this story we are constantly reinforcing the message that mum/dad/nanny will always come back.” The teacher commented on the importance of knowing the background of individual children and the ways in which this assists in transition. For one child, with a diagnosis that identified additional needs, it transpired that he did not like to eat in the company of other children, so time and space for him to eat in a way that made him feel comfortable was established.

Parent’s voice

“[some children] have been given opportunities to do things that make them feel safe and happy. If they need to have some rest time, some alone time or additional play time with buddies – so, sort of individual needs being met, I think is really important at Kindy.”



Stories were selected with consideration of the children’s experiences of transition to school.

During the two story times of the day, the teacher shared books on emotions and starting or being at school to reinforce the emotional understanding of the feelings children may experience. This had been a change from the previous year where the teacher used stories the children might enjoy. Discussion from the stories ensued to reinforce feelings of personal safety and belonging.

Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connection between children, families, educators, school and community.

There were several activities in which children and their families could participate to establish relationships and connections. These started with the family tour of the school and the Kindergarten open days. There was a ‘Stay and Play’ date at the end of the year where children and families can come and play before school starts the following year. In addition, there is a family play group run by two parents where children may have participated. The staff believed that relationships were key to a successful transition and described how they thought this was an area they did well. However, the teacher commented they were always continuing to “make some tweaks and changes” to better strengthen relationships. A parent also described the importance of relationships in the transition process, as she said “I think it’s having a really trusting relationship with the teacher. My oldest in particular, that was a really big thing for her. She had to feel really safe and comfortable and that someone really ‘had her back’. Obviously as parents, when we’re not there, you have to know that there’s someone that can take on that role.”

The relationships between staff and families were evident in the positioning of staff at entry and exit times, and with greetings and conversations that reinforced a sense of security for children. The teacher was available to families, one mother was observed telling her quietly that her child was tired that day and the teacher nodded and told her that she wouldn’t pressure him to participate. Part of developing the relationship was how the start of the day was calm and allowed for families to settle their children.

Parent’s voice

One thing I should mention about transitions (apart from COVID-19 regulations) is that they do allow parents and siblings to go into the classroom and sit down with their kids for about 15 minutes or however long it takes the kids (to settle). Rather than dropping them at the door and expecting them to go off and get settled all by themselves.

A sense of trust between staff and the families was also deemed important. One mother said, “Trust is so important. Families at Moerlina don’t have to ‘drop and go’ if they don’t want to. We have a very open flow of welcoming families and supporting families in leaving when they’re ready or when it works.” She went on to say that she appreciated that if the child didn’t settle or was very tired the school



Inviting provocations were set up to support multiple ways of thinking and knowing.

would ring. To further assist in building relationships the staff had decided to gift the children a school hat. On their first day children were able to select a hat for outdoor play. The teacher had bought an array of colours, so children had choice. She said that they decided on this “because that made it quite a nice connection... the idea that I’m actually gifting something to them on their first day as well.”

Design principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families and professional colleagues.

The school had a number of ways of communicating with families whose children were transitioning into the school. Apart from orientation at a “Stay and play” session the year before, the Early Learners questionnaire had been the main way of getting information from families. Additionally, just before the school year began, the teacher would send an email to families asking for a family photo and providing information addressing what would happen on the first day. The teacher believed it was important that each parent had a good idea of what was going to happen when they arrived.

Teacher’s voice

She said, “I also put in a section where I was very explicit about what happens on the 1st morning... and so I went through exactly what our process was as the families entered the school, where to come into, that the child can select a cubby hole, what we unpack, where they put their bags etc, so the parents could read it and know what’s going to happen, to take the anxiety out.”

She would also send a postal letter addressed to each child. The school provides a parent information night early in Term 1 and for all parents there were a number of information sessions called “Experts on the Couch”, with topics generally focusing on areas considered relevant to parents of early learners. In these sessions, professional colleagues from outside of the school shared information with families on a number of topics, such as sleep, how to assist our children in developing their pre-literacy skills, anxiety and regulation etc.

However, during the project more thought was given to communication and information gathering with families whereby the school would provide opportunity for parents to share information about their children throughout the year and about what they felt might help them to better support their children. Gaining more information about the children was a major change.

She would also send a postal letter addressed to each child. The school also provided a parent information night early in Term 1 and for all early years of school parents there were a number of sessions called “Experts on the couch”. In these sessions, professional colleagues shared information with families over a number of topics, such as sleep, how to assist our children in developing their pre-literacy skills, anxiety and regulation etc.

However, during the project thought was given to how to achieve a more balanced communication and information sharing between families and the school. This meant asking parents for information more often and perhaps thinking more carefully about the information we were giving or telling them. Gaining more information about the children was a major change.

Principal's voice

"Having that (gathering information from the family) at the forefront and going forward and having the information before we start the year as well, I think that's been a big change for us."

This year the communication process had changed. The teacher described that she had been considering many options over the course of the transitions project and had decided to produce a 'Welcome to Kindy 2022' Padlet. This was explained to the families and photos of the environment were entered to get it started. Families could share this with their children to help with familiarising them with what to expect. The teacher put some videos about what the families would need to know before they came. The Padlet is akin to an online bulletin board where both the teacher and the families can post. The Principal thought the Padlet had made the transition process clear and established a reciprocal means of communication between the teacher and families that would be ongoing in addition to the teacher being available every morning and every afternoon to talk to parents. A parent agreed that communication had improved with this tool, stating, "Communication was really good. Probably improved from last year in terms of what to expect in the first week. Who was going to be there and what was going on when, that was more detailed."

Collaboratively design a shared blueprint of the 'transition game plan' that is culturally responsive to children, families and respects the values of the school's ethos.

The idea of asking families more about their children came from thinking around building a shared understanding of the transition process, in ways that made it individual for each child in keeping with the school ethos. The Principal said families had always been invited to share information about their child, and their family home life, with the school.

However, she thought the difference this time was that the teacher was preparing families with the reasons why she was interested in gathering information about the children's FoI and FoK during the visit the previous year. In rethinking about what to ask families in the survey, the Principal spoke of a strong desire to find out more about families' cultural knowledge in ways that could assist in transitions. She believed the school had always done this to some extent but were refining their practice. In this section parent/carers were asked what they thought the teachers should know about their child. The teacher described that on the Padlet the families were able to access a blank fillable survey but were also provided one with suggestions on what families might like to include in each section. "What would you like me to know about your child and family?" This gave families the opportunity to share information about important people, siblings, pets, what does their child like, languages spoken at home, cultural and religious beliefs, the child's strengths etc. "What does your child need help with?" And "Any additional information," which may include any concerns about the transition process for their child, who collects and drops the child off on different days etc.

Principal's voice

"It's not new. The timeliness has changed but it always existed. We're focused on gathering more information. But it's always been part of our practice. We've always had a strong philosophy of recognition. Gathering information before they start school and [having] more explicit conversations about why we do this is what has changed."



The indoor environment is prepared with consideration of the diverse preferences for play and opportunities for talk.

Design principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

The teacher and Principal had spoken about a focus on FoI and FoK and it was evident from the parent interviews that parents very much appreciated the renewed focus on the children as the transition goes. One parent described how and why she thought the transition was effective when she said, “I think compared to other schools they’re very good at respecting the child’s needs. I don’t feel like I’m being rushed out the gate. They’re all really supportive, so I feel like they’re getting the children to feel safe and maybe start an activity that would help them transition so they’re not forced into doing, if its mat time, if they’re anxious. They can do an activity that might help them feel a bit more safe.” This parent went onto comment that the Principal had been involved in the new approach, recognising that “the whole school is on board and it’s their philosophy to help the transition to class.”

The engagement of all school staff with the transitions project was described by the teacher. The school has a professional learning culture whereby staff members report on research projects that they work on back to others in staff meetings and on professional development days. This shared knowledge then led to ongoing professional interest and conversations where the teacher reported that others “questioned me about it.” She explained that from engaging with other staff and eliciting interest throughout her work on the transitions project, it had resulted in “massive changes throughout the whole school” in looking at all transition points, and that focus and reflection on transitions had shown staff the importance of many practices “we just took for granted.”

The Principal also spoke about the shared journey across the four classes that made up the school. She said, “We’ve seen change happen throughout the school.” She also spoke about the kindergarten teacher being open to feedback from families and other staff in this process. She said the teacher had responded to feedback throughout the project. The conversations, collection of information and the children’s input allowed the teacher to make immediate changes as well as consider how to work more effectively with the parents around the transition.

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

The Principal had made a commitment to be involved in the project and attended all the professional learning days. This helped with changes the teacher wanted to make easier to discuss because the Principal also had an invested interest in the project. The teacher was enabled to make changes to not only her timetable but the timetable that dictated where specialist teachers should be and when.

She spoke about “letting go of any agenda or any timetable.” The assistants that she worked with were also supportive and helpful in the changes she wanted to make.

After the first two days of the school term the teacher was absent due to COVID-19 but said having set up the Padlet made it easy to send the links to the relief teacher. They reorganised the whole school’s timetable to accommodate using one of the specialist teachers as relief, as some of the children had worked with or met her before. This familiarity, and her knowledge and understanding of the Kindergarten environment was seen as important to supporting transition. The teacher described this level of support as a whole school commitment to ensuring the transition of their younger children would be prioritised.

The Principal and teacher had mapped their strategies to the Design principles grid and were in further negotiations about a transitions policy. Both had spoken of keeping the momentum of the project going and to set out clear guidelines for transition in the enrolment process and a transition policy.

Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

This is a school where everyone helped each other. For example, when the Principal entered to discuss the possibility of a child who was tired and irritable leaving early, she stayed with the class and supervised outdoor play while the teacher exited with the child to the school office. The Kindergarten teacher was suddenly absent due to quarantine requirements from day three of school. The Principal praised the work the teacher had done before the children had started which assisted in the change. She praised the project and said, “If there was ever a year that was going to be a challenge, I think this was it.” She spoke about all the strategies that the teacher had put in place, including mapping the children coming in with their interests. When the teacher went into quarantine, the administration was equipped to make plans to accommodate the change without major disruption to the children. The Principal said that the families were great in responding to the changes put in place and this was because in her belief, the teacher had already established clear lines of communication using Padlet which built a sense of trust.

One parent commented on the flexibility of the school to be able to pivot at such an important time. She said, “They handled it so well. The fact they rearranged the rest of the school so she (the relief teacher) could stay there full time, I thought that was phenomenal. The communication through emails and that sort of thing was really great. There were little messages that we could relay directly on to the kids. I responded back to the emails and she (the teacher) responded back to me, so the communication was really good.” Another parent said that the teacher Facetimed the children and that her son “was really excited to talk about seeing her at home (Facetime with the teacher) and her son and her dog and all of that. Yeah, I think they did a really great job.”

Conclusion

The Transforming transitions project was seen to influence the clear movement to reinforcing children's belonging within the centre and the school. It was evident that new strategies to investigate and describe children and families FoK and FoI were put in place. The information was then used in ways that illustrated to children and families that each child was seen as an individual and were known to staff. Asking different questions, preparing ways of communicating and receiving information, rather than mainly giving, showed children and their families that school was "ready" for them. Furthermore, the project influence on thinking about transitions had strengthened child and family friendly practices across the school.

Teacher's voice – what did they see differently?

Teacher's reflection

"As a school we value connection and relationships with our children and their families, and fostering a safe and joyous place to learn, wonder and explore. Throughout this project I feel we were given the opportunity to examine how we could deepen these connections and better assist our youngest children and their families transition from home into our shared environment and thrive. Through the project we developed an understanding of FoK and FoI and its importance in giving both the children and families the opportunity to share their stories and for us as a school to gather important information in a meaningful way."

Principal's reflection

"From a leadership perspective, developing a sense of belonging and creating a safe and secure environment for not only the children, but also for their families, makes for a much calmer and trusting space for everyone who is a part of our school community – children, their families, and staff. This project provided us, as a school, with a framework and principles to interrogate our practices and to explore how we could respond more effectively to provide for our children and families in this transition from home to school. While we have a strong history of valuing relationships between home and school, the project has given more depth to the relationships we build with families through the gathering of rich and meaningful information, and to our understanding of each child and what's important to them as they introduce themselves to us – giving their voice to their story."



Invitations to play and engage with resources and books promote opportunities for children to share their own stories and engage imagination.

Lance Holt School

School Context

Lance Holt School is a Pre-Kindergarten to Year 6 independent school which lies in the heart of a port city and was opened in 1970. It has a commitment to positive education, focussing on the 'whole child' with an emphasis on listening to student's voices, student wellbeing and school connectedness. Sustainability, social justice, and community participation are described as core values. The school is committed to being a Child Safe school dedicated to safeguarding the rights and safety of children. Further, Lance Holt School commits to fostering children's emotional wellbeing, assisting children to reach their full potential and being connected to the local community.

Transition Point

Pre-Kindergarten

'Prindy' is a Pre-Kindergarten class for three-year-old children who attend once they had their birthday. In 2022 the class had four children at the beginning of the school year. They attend on Thursday and Friday mornings for three hours from 9 -12. The Prindy philosophy is play-based and child-centred with a recognition that a child of this age is "taking their first steps into a wider community and new places of belonging (www.lanceholtschool.wa.edu.au/love-of-learning/pre-kind/). There is an 'open door policy' and parents are encouraged to stay for the morning mat sessions as these nurture connections between home to school.

Our Story

The leaders spoke about joining the project to see what they could improve and to evaluate their processes around children's transitions into the school. They were intrigued by the design-based thinking process and how that would play out in the project. The Prindy class starts with the children who are already three and welcomes the remainder of the class once the children have their third birthday, so transition for children and families is an ongoing process. Prior to the project, families were provided with a Transition Form asking for information about the child and family context. Before Covid, a Prindy morning tea was usually held prior to the commencement of the school year for families, children, and staff to begin fostering relationships with each other and the new environment. Prindy has an indoor/outdoor program with learning invitations set up in both environments where children engage with learning experiences of their own choice. The mornings follow simple routines to foster predictability and a sense of belonging.

Teacher's voice – Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity

Were they terms you used before?

"They weren't...took me a little while to understand... not things I had used as part of my vocabulary before. They were helpful, absolutely, because they really highlighted for us the importance of the life of the child".

How important is knowing about FoK and FoI?

"Yes, I think it's really important. If we don't take that as a starting point, then we're doing a disservice to the families and the children. But this project has allowed us to turn the focus around and made sure that we know the children and the families and that we can make sure that the transition is successful and positive and is a really good start to these children's and families first school experience."

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

The design principles provided an opportunity to reflect upon existing transitions practices that had been designed, reviewed and evaluated over several years. Through the fresh lenses the principles provided, the educators at Lance Holt School took on a position of innovation, engaged in 'blue sky thinking' and dedicated themselves to enhancing practices that championed the class teacher as a leader of transition in their space and children and their families as valuable contributors to how transitions might be transformed.



Bibliotherapy is a way to use books to talk about feelings and experiences.

Design principle 1: Being and belonging to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of knowledge and identity: invest in the 'virtual back packs' children bring through intentional planning.

The teacher described using information about children in what she prepared in the learning environment. However, she also said the project had focused their attention, in a "deeper way" and in doing this, changes were made to the enrolment and transition processes and use of the information gathered. The teacher suggested that having FoK and FoI knowledge made what she planned to do more intentional, in the way in which she connected to what children knew and could do. Some of this information came from children themselves on the Transition forms. The teacher described "a section where the child can sit down with one of their care givers and answer the questions that are on there. We seek information from them that way before they start." She said, "with FoK and FoI I took information about the child I had collected in the transition process and embedded that in learning invitations. This year I want to be more intentional in this... across the year." She spoke of a question in the form that reads, "What is your child currently curious about?" adding "I tried to add resources to the environment that would support that, so (child's name) with the tools. Also, knowing he likes climbing so I added environmental invitations for that."

Section 2: Child's Perspective

Please complete this section with your child. It should reflect their feelings and perspectives.

Name of the person assisting the child to complete this section:	
Relationship to the child:	
At home, my favourite thing to do is:	
I think I am really good at:	
Sometimes I might need help to:	
Things that I am curious about:	
I think school will be.....	
Is there anything else you would like your new Teacher to know?	
What do you think you'll do in Prindy?	

Questionnaire for parents to complete with children at the start of the year.

Teacher's voice

"With FoK and FoI I took information about the child I had collected in the transition process and embedded that in learning invitations. This year I want to be more intentional in this... across the year."

The teacher used information about each child to guide her conversations with them throughout the morning. For example, she was heard talking to one of the boys about things that happened at his house, and he happily chatted about the toys he had in the bath. Another example was the use of this knowledge on the boy's name tags. When introducing one child to his name tag, she told him that she knew he liked trains and that next week she would get the train set out for him. The teacher said knowing what the children were interested in before they came to school was very important and assisted her in setting up learning invitations in the environment. She said, "The pictures I put on their name tags comes directly from the information I'd received about their interests or things that they think they are quite good at."

Two boys spoke another language at home. The teacher acknowledged this FoK with the children as the experts saying, "I think I will be learning French and German from the boys this year." She also used several visual aids to promote the children's FoK and FoI. One strategy that had been successful was a school/home book where the families could send in photos of activities or experiences they had out of school. This book developed over the year. Families were excited to contribute, and children were enthusiastic to share the contents with others. The teacher thought she would use the information in the school/home book more this year to focus on the FoK and FoI that children bring. At the beginning of the year, to foster the children's relationships with each other, the teacher started a Prindy Friends book with each child's photograph and name. She said to the boys, "Do you know what, I've got a book with you in it (child's name) and you in it (child's name)!" It was noted that both boys both went to the teacher and looked at the A4 size book with their laminated photos, including a photo of a child who was enrolled but not present. They looked at each photo and talked about who it was and some of their features.

Teacher's voice

"I'll be focusing on embedding that a lot more into how I set the environment up... Last year they spoke about it and the photos just stayed in the schoolbook and it never really went anywhere."



Timetable cards.

Respect the child's right to 'be' a child: Affirm each child's identity and sense of safety.

While the teacher had a timetable of how time in the day might be portioned, in the very early days of the first weeks of school this was driven mainly by the children to affirm their sense of safety. The teacher explained that for very young children who had just turned three, it was important to have flexibility in what they did. On the pin up board was a visual prompt for the day, but it was observed that if the children did not want to participate, they were invited but not coerced. For example, when the teacher said it was time for a story on the mat, one child joined and the other played in the home corner while the story was read.

Families were invited to stay as long as they liked.

The teacher felt strongly that transitions were not effective when children and families feel rushed or when teachers might "brush off any emotions the child could be feeling."

Children and families were greeted at the door and helped to put their bags away in their pigeon-holes. They then selected what they would like to do either indoors or outdoors. On the first day both boys had one parent stay for the full session, but upon consultation with parents, they each felt their children were settled enough to be left on their own, they then left the boys after fifteen to twenty minutes as the week continued. The teacher spoke of the sense of security children experienced when families felt invited and welcome to stay.

In the Prindy Handbook parents were supported with information about what to expect on the first day and ideas in supporting children's transitions.

Supporting a Successful Separation

We understand that beginning Prindy is a big milestone for children (and families!). We know that children settle into their new environment at different rates and some may have a tricky time in separating from you- this is completely normal.

If you feel as though your child may have a hard time or they are experiencing difficulty separating, speak with Danica so that she can provide support through this process and work with you to tailor a gentle approach in helping your child to successfully separate.

Here are some things for you to keep in mind for successful separations:

- ◆ If your child is expressing nerves about separating, always be sure to acknowledge their feelings and let them know that it's normal to feel nervous. Let them know that Danica and Hannah are there to help them and talk to them about some of the things they might do while they're at Prindy.
- ◆ One of the goals of Prindy is for the children to feel safe, comfortable and confident in the school environment. What we want is for you to reach the point where you are confident in leaving your child. Children are amazing at picking up on your confidence – think parent as a confident leader. A confident goodbye sends your child the message that they are safe at Prindy and that Danica or Hannah can care for them.
- ◆ Remember, consistency is your friend. When you ensure that your goodbyes are as predictable and consistent as possible, your child feels safe in knowing what to expect. When you hesitate and come back for one more kiss, this consistency and predictability wavers.

Some ideas that can help you and your child prepare:

- ◆ A particularly beautiful book that has helped lots of children and families separate successfully is 'The Kissing Hand' by Audrey Penn (it also has a lovely idea in it to support separating). Reading through this can help children to understand this transition and feel secure in the process. We do have a couple of copies at school that you're welcome to borrow, you can purchase an eBook version through Booktopia and it's also available as a read-along on YouTube.
- ◆ Engage in role play with your child and rehearse what will happen when you say goodbye. You can begin this with toys (eg: a parent toy saying goodbye to a child toy, momentarily 'leaving' and then returning) before progressing to role playing the scenarios yourselves, with the parent physically leaving the room for a couple of seconds before returning. The purpose behind this role play is for your child to rehearse the goodbye process and understand that you will *always* return through repeated experience. Keep in mind that you want it to be fun- not stressful! If your child starts to show signs of stress, it's time to stop.
- ◆ Before you leave for school in the morning, draw a small heart on your palm as well as your child's palm. This heart serves as a reminder for your child throughout the day and is like you've never left them.

Parent brochure to assist parents with separating from their child.



Creating a home like space in the dramatic play area.

Creating home like spaces to play in also gave children a sense of safety as they could re-enact what they knew about home. A home corner was such a space and was made a little larger at the beginning of the year.

The teacher felt it was important that children see themselves in the space so that they built a sense of “I belong here”. Using the family photos and the book about the individual children was a way to do this, as well using the FoK and Fol in preparing the learning environment. This was evident when the teacher was observed showing a child the photos on the wall. She said, “(child’s name), do you know I’ve got a photo of you on the wall?” They then walked to the main display wall and the child named everyone in the photo for the teacher. The teacher then explained to the child, “This photo can come off the wall so if you feel you miss mum and dad you can take it off the wall and have them with you.”

Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connections between children, families, educators, school, and community.

The school staff believe that relationships and connections to the school community are crucial to successful transitions. The teacher said, “relationships are fundamental to any transition.” She went on to outline that relationships go beyond that of the teacher-child. She said, “it’s relationships between the child and educator, educator and families and educator and the family as a unit.” She described these relationships as “deep” and transitions would not work if they were “superficial”. She explained relationships were strengthened by joining the children’s play, providing, extending their learning with their FoK and Fol and forming “an understanding of each child and what made them tick”.

It was evident that the children and families were welcomed into the school. On one morning two older children bought their sibling into Prindy. The teacher knew them and had a conversation about their holiday adventures. Being a small school, many of the staff, including the early years leader, were also around the class, and teachers who were in the shared yard would also converse with the children. At one time the teacher had to leave to collect some resources in a nearby classroom and one of the children went with her to see his sibling. The families or carers who collected the children were always greeted by staff across the school.

Relationships between teachers, children and their families were promoted from commencement. On the second day the teacher said to one child, “You made a new friend yesterday. Do you remember his name?” It was noted that the child’s mother joined in the conversation and said “He came home saying he had a new friend. He said, ‘I’ve got a new friend!’” The child then took his mother by the hand to show her his family photo on the wall.



The environment was designed to feel home-like to support a sense of security and belonging.



Design principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families, and professional colleagues.

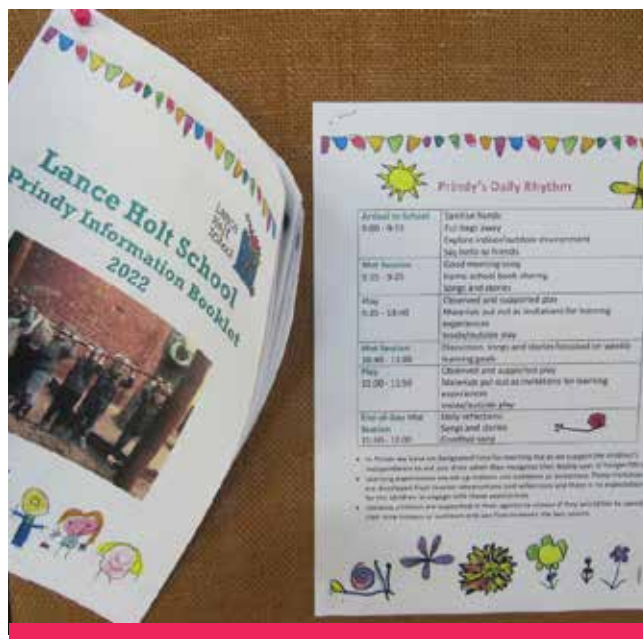
Involvement in the project had demonstrated to the staff that while they felt their transition process was successful, there was room to strengthen the information sought from families. There were a number of ways the school had changed in their communication with families to invite parent input, such as changing questions on the Transition Form and describing at the top of the form why this information was important and how it would be used. The school Principal discussed that, while the transition form already sought general information about “what’s important to them, any worries they might have, what helps them to learn, and what might get in the way of that, learning about the FoI and FoK led to the inclusion of questions seeking information about family values and, expectations.

Teacher’s voice

“This project helped me look through not only the teacher lens but the parent lens and the child lens as well. Before we were giving information. That principle really helped me in making it more open and more of a two-way communication – not just giving information but listening as well.”

The teacher spoke of making a small video of the environment both indoor and outdoor; an idea she borrowed from another school in the project. She said, “One of the things I changed this year was creating a video and sending it to the children. So, what I’ve done is taken some photos of the classroom space. Then had a video of me welcoming the children, introducing myself and sharing information that they could relate to.” The class had small numbers so the teacher spoke about personalising the videos with the child’s name on the opening slide and then mentioning the child’s name in the video, “so they know that it’s something specifically for them.”

The teacher also sent information for families via email and offered the opportunity for a phone conversation. Reflecting on the parent feedback received throughout the project, the teacher developed a booklet that she believes contains the information families need to know to support a successful transition to Prindy such as supporting families through separating, toileting, and what learning looks like in Prindy. She said, “I feel like I’d answered anything (in the booklet) that might have been niggling for them.” The early years leader said the booklet “has been one of the big changes. She noticed that it really met the parents’ needs from conversations with both the parents and the children... and that “it’s been updated and is so thorough.” She went on to say that the teacher’s communication with families was “fantastic... being really proactive with getting in touch with families.”



Prindy Information Booklet.

The booklet described the way in which the children’s learning would be communicated to families. One family had asked if – like the childcare setting their son had attended – they would receive daily updates. The teacher described that she would send a regular learning story that would show how children were learning and developing. Here is an excerpt from one such communication:

Collaboratively design a shared blueprint of the ‘transition game plan’ that is culturally responsive to children, families and respects the values of the school’s ethos

The collaboration between the teacher and the early years leader led to a shared understanding of how the process or game plan might look. This collaboration extended to the families to get more information of what they wanted to know or how the transition process might change for the better. One phase in the project was to invite families to share reflections of their experience of transitions using an anonymous survey. This is the first time the school had sought parent feedback regarding the transition process and was completed by most families from the previous Prindy and Kindergarten cohorts. The responses unearthed new information about what parents would like to know. For example, the teacher spoke about families wanting to know more about what the children would be doing during their time in Prindy, how toileting was approached, and support for separation anxiety, and so she responded by including this in the new booklet. The teacher said she believed that having transparent practice was critical to an effective transition.

After the professional learning and discussions with the early year's leader (who became the acting Principal during the project) the questions used to elicit information from families changed on the Transition Form. One of the new questions asked, "what is it that they value and what values do they hope we will uphold in Prindy." The teacher described how getting to know the children included knowing and relating to the family. The teacher went on to explain that knowing this she was able to embed different family values into her practice. She described one family who very much wanted a sun safe environment for their child. The teacher responded, "it might not necessarily go into my planning, but I know in the back of my mind that I have to encourage him to wear his hat and make sure he's drinking water and from 11 o'clock on they don't want him playing outside." To help ensure consistency in communications with parents, one of the new processes the teacher described was the creation of a transition timeline for staff "so I can check off if I've done everything for the families. Making sure I've received information. Made it an explicit part of the process."

Being culturally responsive to children and families was something the teacher said she was rethinking in the transition process. This was because she had thought about culture mainly as acknowledging ethnicity, "this is not correct as every family has its own culture". In thinking through what this might look like in her practice, she talked of using the home/schoolbook which illustrated what families did and to whom they were connected. She described this information as "a beautiful insight of what the families do outside of school" and planned to use the information from this source of evidence to a deeper level throughout the year. Also included in the Prindy information booklet was an inquiry into FoK sharing that also reinforced the ideas of parents as partners in their child's educational journey.



Talking with children about their interests and where they like to play creates a sense of belonging.

Sharing Skills, Talents and Culture

Can you sew? Play music? Cook something your child loves? Enjoy sharing stories? Want to organise an art activity? Is there something special your family celebrates? Know a great nursery rhyme? We love to have families share their expertise and enthusiasm with us as it enriches our program and strengthens children's sense of belonging and connection in Prindy. Please talk to Danica if you would like to share your skills, talents or culture with our class.



Information sharing about skills, talents and culture as described in the information booklet.

Design principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

It was evident the school approaches transitions with the view they are a support structure for welcoming children and families into the school community. The teacher described being more explicit and intentional in her actions, as she thought that previously some transition processes had not been clearly articulated. The example she gave was the realisation that transitions were not only the child into the class but the family into the school “what it looks like to be a Prindy child and a Lance Holt family” and the many ways to be involved. She believed that, previously, this element of transition hadn’t been unpacked or even necessarily considered. The early years leader added that being involved from the beginning had enabled her to assist the school to focus on “the systems we’ve got in place and seeing how we can improve them with regard to the experience for children’s families.” In doing so the focus had “changed a lot” she said, “ensuring that we have really good knowledge about children and families and the values they bring.” The project had also influenced transitions across the school for all commencing families who are now given the opportunity to share information about their child, their family and what they value. Details about the best ways to keep in touch with parents were also included.

Early years leader’s voice

“Transitions in Pre Kindy have been so useful for us and focusing on building on those strong relationships from the beginning.”

Through participating in this project, the leader described that it has led to a commitment from all staff to engage in continuous reflection of the transition process not only in the early years but across the school. She said, “We will definitely continue having a really strong focus on making sure that our transitions are working for families and getting information back from them to see how their experience is going and tweaking things as we’re going.” The transition project was described as “incredibly valuable” in rethinking the way that children and families are welcomed into the school community.

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

The commitment of the school and participating staff has been apparent throughout the project. The early years leader spoke of “being there from the beginning” and how it worked well to involve leadership with teachers. She said that “when we were able to sit down together it was most useful because we could get down to the minutia of the child’s experience and family experiences and I think it’s particularly useful when you can look at it from the perspective of the person who’s actually in the classroom.”

When To Step In And When to Step Back

When you are in the Prindy room, you may see children having social challenges together. We acknowledge that it can be difficult as a parent, to know what to do if or when this occurs. In this situation, please seek help or assistance from an educator rather than try to resolve the issue yourself. Similarly, if your child is having difficulty with another child at school, please let Danica know rather than speaking directly to the other child or their parent.



Information to support parent’s whilst settling children in the room.

Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced transition processes. Normally, the teacher would host a family gathering just before commencement of the school year. However, this had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. Instead, the video made by the teacher assisted the children to not only see the indoor and outdoor environment but also get to know their teacher before beginning school. The changes made were an attempt to foster successful and positive transitions considering COVID-19 restrictions. The early years leader said that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to meaningfully transition very young children without their families being permitted inside the classroom. It was fortunate that restrictions were lifted so the class could commence as planned.

Conclusion

During the project, the design principles were added to a grid so that schools could use them to plan for transitions. The Prindy teacher spoke about how valuable this was to assist in the conversations and planning that was undertaken to improve transitions. She described the conversations sometimes “going down a rabbit hole” and the design principles assisted in keeping them focused. Planning in this way had also assisted in thinking about transitions in the upper years of the school. The Principal said that the project had “been so useful for us and focusing on building on those strong relationships from the beginning”.

Teacher’s voice – what did they see differently?

The project as a whole has gifted us with the opportunity to view transitions as a multidimensional experience – it’s not just what we as teachers do, it’s the experience of the children and the families and the very beginning step in their journey as a Lance Holt family. It’s actually urged us to reconsider transitions across the school and to think deeply about how we approach not only the bigger transitions but also the smaller day-to-day transitions.

Living Waters Lutheran College

School Context

Living Waters Lutheran College was inaugurated in 1997 and is an independent Christian school located in Warnbro, Western Australia. The school serves 582 students from Kindergarten to Year 12 and 10% of students are noted to have a language background other than English. The school website describes the goal “through the teaching of a balanced curriculum, reinforced by Christian values’... so that... “each student is encouraged and supported to develop their talents and gifts.” The Early Learning Centre caters for children in Kindergarten to Year 2 and advocates a play-based approach. In 2021, a Walker Learning approach was adopted with the intent to expand upward into the primary school over time.

Transition Point

Kindergarten

The Kindergarten program integrates a learning environment which balances a Walker Learning Approach alongside teacher directed mat times and small group activities. Kindergarten and Pre-primary classes share a playground that link indoor and outdoor play-based learning experiences. The Kindergarten setting comprises two adjoining rooms. One class teacher and two education assistants use one room with a capacity of 26 children. At the commencement of 2021 and 2022, Kindergarten enrolments swelled beyond this capacity during the first week of school. In both instances, an additional teacher was employed to teach a second Kindergarten class in the adjoining room. Kindergarten children attend Monday to Wednesday from 8.45 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. The Kindergarten Education Assistant runs a local pre-kindergarten program and moves with the children through the transition to school.

Our Story

The Kindergarten transition at Living Waters Lutheran College has evolved over several years. Innovations such as Kindy Cafés and fête-style open days were introduced to support a steady flow of enrolments into the school. The Kindy Cafés were a series of ‘get to know you’ sessions held in the months prior to commencing school. They involved a casual morning tea with the Kindergarten teachers and support staff, where the children could play in the early years setting for a few hours, get to know the teachers and meet the school Principal. The open days were advertised to local early learning centres and the broader community. Prospective families were invited to the open days to become familiar with the school and fun activities such as jumping castle and stalls were incorporated into the day. The school also offers guided tours and introductory interviews to orient prospective families.

Transition processes for children’s initial days of Kindergarten follow a conventional model of full days and a program of mat time, small group rotations and outdoor play. Key staff in the school community, including the school’s Pastor are also introduced to the children on the first day. In 2021, parents were required to drop off their child to the classroom in small groups to ensure room capacity was not exceeded. In 2022 all parents were able to come to the room at drop off however a sudden increase in enrolments on the first day led to an impromptu adaptation to move children and their parents to the outdoor play space at drop off to provide space to soothe unsettled children. This adaptation began ongoing discussion about how sudden enrolments on the first day might be better managed in Kindergarten to support effective transitions to school.

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

The early childhood team took time to reflect upon the design principles for transition to navigate a way forward for their unique context. They resolved that transition practices should move toward supporting a more child and family focussed approach. Their intent was to facilitate a stronger sense of belonging at their school and to strengthen partnerships with families through a more reflexive process of sharing and understanding one another.



Walker Learning inspired provocations to support engagement and mindfulness.

Design Principle 1: Being and belonging to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of knowledge and identity: invest in the 'virtual backpacks' children bring through intentional planning.

The project prompted staff to adopt an approach to transitions that might better respond to the children's FoK and FoI. The teacher began to formulate ways to find out more about the children's FoK and FoI before they came to school and to embed this in the classroom environment and conversations, creating touchpoints of familiarity and belonging for the children. In addition, the teachers wished to gain information about the children's FoK to support planning for learning centres and experiences. They planned to implement this as the program evolved into more independent Walker Learning stations and the children settled into the school routine. To find out more about the children, the teachers reconceptualised the existing Kindy Cafés as opportunities to take note of the children's interests. Informal photos were taken of the children and their families with things from the classroom or home to display on the initial days of school. The parents were also asked to create a picture of the child's family and home and bring this to the final Kindy Café before school commenced.

Teacher's voice

"We're using that information as we set up our activities so their things that their familiar with – I think that's really important. We're just more aware of what we are doing and why."

Conversations initiated at the Kindy Cafés were continued when school commenced, with the teachers capitalising on what the teacher referred to as, "invaluable information about the families" they discovered during arrivals to schools. The Kindergarten teacher explained, "We've been using the information we've been gathering in our planning. We're using it in our Walker learning stations for things like 'who are your favourite superheroes?... Who's in your family?... And finding out 'what did you do on the weekend?... So, we can use these things as conversation starters to help us make connections when they are getting started for the day in their learning." Parent's perceptions of the collection of information about the children and their families was positive, and the touch points were noticed. One parent commented, "I saw photos of [my child] on See-saw doing things that I know are of interest to him that we had mentioned." The parents also appreciated that the teachers considered their child holistically. One parent stated, "[finding out from parents] is useful, because it helps the teachers understand the child as a whole. Everyone has different cultures and values and beliefs, so it helps the teacher understand the children as individuals". During this process, the terms FoI and FoK were adopted by the Kindergarten teacher and became a shared understanding among the early childhood staff.

Teacher's voice

"I don't know how you could do transitions well any other way (without info from families) – you're just setting yourself up to fail."



A welcome wall provides information to the kindergarten community, including children contributions

Respect the child's right to 'be' a child: Affirm each child's identity and sense of safety.

From the teacher's experience of transitions, the parents' feelings about their child starting school were frequently reflected in how the child presented. The teacher explained that she had become more conscious of "...working with how the children were when they arrive at school and of the parent's feelings of anxiety or stress or happiness then they walked through the door." This prompted realisation that parents were also experiencing a transition. The teachers considered what could be done to support parent transitions alongside their child. One strategy was to stagger the entry, splitting the class into two groups to attend on consecutive days. This was proposed to support greater parental engagement on their child's first days and support both parents and children to become settled at a slower pace. However due to several factors this did not eventuate. An influx of student enrolments during the initial weeks further highlighted the potential of a staggered start for supporting the children's wellbeing and sense of safety. Some parents attributed their child's raised anxiety about being at school across the first two weeks to the high number of children in the class, citing an increase in crying and "being clingy."

The teacher worked to alleviate anxiety and a sense of safety for children with her own raised awareness of the critical nature of transitions. Her new insights into the importance of children's sense of safety prompted her to refocus her priorities, adapting her program to meet the overall goals of supporting the children's sense of wellbeing and belonging. The long-held routine of an indoor mat session at the commencement of school was changed in 2022, moving the children outdoors into a calmer environment to regulate noise, create a sense of space, and successfully establish security for all. The adjustment helped to gently ease children into whole class mat sessions, as many had not learnt in a group situation before. In previous years, this routine had proved to be challenging without constant adult direction. The dismissal routine was also reimaged over a few iterations to establish a procedure that maintained harmony and assisted children and parents to feel calm and secure when reunited.

Teacher's voice

"I noticed some [parents] had no frame of reference – they put a uniform on and changed their expectations of what children could do – they are still just 40 months old and it's a big first moment of a first hour of a first day of a first month of a first year – its huge."

Parent concerns around the transition to Kindergarten linked to their expectations of school and the differing expectations teachers may have of their child. Parents described their anxieties for their child such as to whether their child would cope, make friends or was mature enough to attend. Some parents attributed the children's excitement

about commencing school to their actions at home. One mother explained the parents' job was to help their child with "...emotional stuff – not doing the ABCs" and support them to develop independence from their parents before they come to school. Furthermore, some parents emphasised the importance of their role in preparing children for transition explaining proactive home-based strategies of role-playing getting ready for school and school drop off routines. Other parents attributed the teacher's strategies of holding Kindy Cafés and sharing a video of themselves walking through the first day of school as most significant. For example, one parent said, "I feel like the preparation [my child] had beforehand has really helped a lot because it was a familiar environment – they'd met everyone beforehand." Attending a pre-kindergarten early learning centre was also perceived as an advantage by some parents, suggesting their children were already conditioned to being part of a large group, not having a rest during the day and following the routines they associated with "big school."

Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connections between children, families, educators, school, and community.

The project assisted the teacher to recognise that "...starting school is a big deal." She spoke of viewing transitions through the child's lens rather than the adult lens and found this affirming. Gaining new information and insights through the project, she felt justified in reinforcing to others that these children were still very young and navigating the transition to school was a substantial life event.

Teacher's voice

"I was looking at it from my point of view and thought I'd made them feel a sense of belonging, but I hadn't looked at it from the child's point of view – ironic really. That's been a really big change."

The transition project allowed the early childhood staff to reflect upon and clarify their understanding of children's capabilities and the knowledge they bring with them. It reaffirmed their belief that learning happened when children feel secure. The staff agreed the transition would be impeded if children felt they did not belong, and parents did not feel comfortable. As such, the children's sense of belonging and connection to place were prioritised, for example, by placing photos of the children with their families at child height around the room and embedding them in playful activities. The project also helped the teacher to recognise that this change was within her control. With newfound confidence, she adjusted the program to accommodate children tiring as the day progressed and the physical space to facilitate better flow and flexible use of play-based resources. She also felt a sense of permission to make responsive decisions 'in the moment,' changing both the sequence and learning environment for the program on the first days to improve the children's comfort and build the parents' confidence to leave their child in the large class.

Design principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families, and professional colleagues.

The early childhood staff recognised that family's connection to the school hinged on the sharing of the school's vision with families from the beginning. Existing practices of holding interviews with parents and conducting school tours had proved an effective platform from which the teacher could build more personal relationships. The teacher understood parents held potential to "...go out into the community and tell their friends" and saw early interactions with parents were important to transition and an opportunity for celebrating the positive culture and environment offered by the school. To harness this, the teachers worked on methods to assist children and families to feel prepared and to smooth the way through building partnerships. The first initiative was to increase the number of Kindy Cafés in the lead up to 2022 transition to allow more time for parents to get to know the teachers and for the children to begin making friends – a priority for some parents. One parent commented, "It was well planned and quite a few months ahead we were having Kindy Cafés and that gave people plenty of opportunity to attend and it was flexible." Prior to the final Kindy Café, the teacher sent out personalised postcards to the children telling them they were excited to see them again.

Parent's voice

"In December, we got a little postcard saying they were excited to see him at the next Kindy Café and he was really excited to receive that"

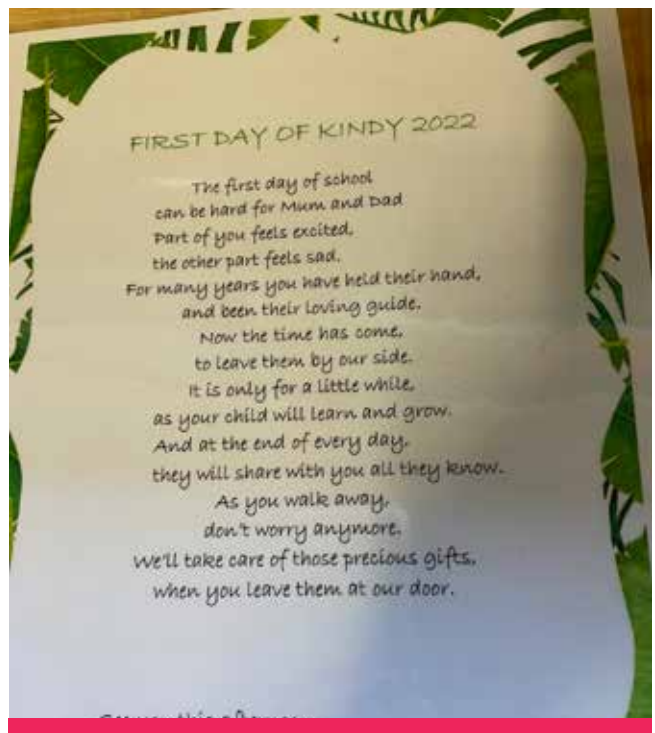
The teacher also created a video of herself walking through the school arrival routine which was shared on See-Saw for the children to view on the days leading up to school. The teacher believed the notable reduction in anxiety and ease of the first day, despite high numbers, was attributed to the video and other connections made with families before school. The teacher sensed the children as she described, "...knew the environment. They knew where things were. That made a huge difference." In response, parents reported excitement from their children and felt confident in how to prepare their child for school. Affirmations from parents were useful for the teachers as they reflected upon the success of the changes made, highlighting the need for a feedback loop between school and home if an authentic shared vision was to be achieved. The teachers also felt empowered to be more innovative in their approach having experienced stronger support from the school community during the 2022 transition. They believed this was a powerful by-product of the improved home-school partnerships that had been cultivated during the Kindy Cafés.

Parent's voice

"Meeting the teachers beforehand and learning their faces is really helpful for the kids"

Collaboratively design a shared blueprint of the 'transition game plan' that is culturally responsive to children, families and respects the values of the school's ethos.

The importance of communicating a shared blueprint for transition with parents and families was exemplified through the unexpected challenges that presented for the teacher across the first two weeks of school. Parent expectations in relation to class size became a potential disruptor to the transition experience. In both 2021 and 2022, enrolments on day one of term were just short of the required number to split into two classes. A change in situation for some families and an influx of late enrolments before the start of the school year contributed to disruptions to the class sizes. After two weeks, two classes were formed when enrolments increased and as a teacher could be appointed. A few parents had concerns about the children being disrupted, and the introduction of an unknown teacher for the second class. This was challenging for the class teacher who had the responsibility of problem-solving and adapting the planned program to alleviate the large class that had resulted in high enrolment numbers. One parent noted that regular communication initiated by the class teacher in the process of change was important. She said, "she was great and kept us in the loop all through it. We pretty much knew what was happening day by day."



Poem at entry to the classroom for parents to read while waiting to collect their child.



Outdoor play space was used during morning drop off to facilitate a calm indoor atmosphere for children to arrive with their parents and settle.

The first two weeks presented constant changes which were communicated to all stakeholders via email as numbers and staffing were settled. Staff engaged in intensive collaboration to find innovative solutions that would uphold the importance of the transition process alongside logistical decisions. For example, temporary groups were created and rotated through indoor and outdoor play to replicate smaller class sizes where possible, using available staff and incorporating the play-based experiences that had been planned to empower the children to share their funds of knowledge in learning centres and build a positive school-based identity through opportunities to share information about themselves during more intimate mat sessions. To assist the children moving to the 'new' Kindergarten class, a video mirroring that of the first Kindergarten teacher was created to introduce

both children and their families to their new teacher ahead of time. This was well received but considered by some parents to be 'starting over' for their children. One parent perceived her daughter was "one of the fortunate ones that didn't have to go to the new class." This suggests that while the 'transition game plan' had been disrupted, the transition practices employed by the Kindergarten teacher in 2022, especially through regular communication of impending changes, had been successful in building parent confidence and for establishing effective partnerships despite the large class size.

Teacher's voice

"Our shared vision is just going to get better and better over time, and we're going to be... 'how about we try this'... and no-one is going to get offended."

Design principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

Leadership was distributed among the early childhood team who were united in their desire for transitions that supported children's well-being. Transitions became understood not as a one-off event at the start of the year, but as happening, as the Kindergarten teacher said, "every day all year – all the little transitions that add up to what they are feeling and experiencing." A child-centred approach to leadership became a shared endeavour for the early childhood team in an approach that involved strong partnerships with parents/carers. The leadership team developed an increased consciousness of the importance of sharing information about families from interviews and school tours with the teachers so it could be used to directly inform the daily experiences programmed for the children. The diversity of parents' experiences of separating from and supporting their child in their unique situations also became better understood across the initial weeks of school. With this insight, the early childhood leadership team came to meetings equipped with situated knowledge to plan and meet individual parent needs so that the circumstances of every child's transition could be considered going forward.

Early childhood coordinator's voice

"Some parents have never left their child anywhere. Having the opportunity to come in and build connections beforehand has made all the difference."

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

Communication between teaching staff and administration was critical through the 2022 transition as enrolments settled. The school offers Kindergarten to Year 12 requiring structural organisation of physical and human resources and these placed constraints for administrators pressed to make decisions about class sizes. Considerable adjustments made by the Kindergarten teacher to enhance transitions at the class level were appreciated by administration who realised that the Early Years team were best placed to advise them on what was the "feeling and anxieties" of parents. They endeavoured to support the team with changes that needed to be made to support transition. The Early Years team felt they had made a substantial investment by largely reinventing their approach with considerable, but somewhat 'invisible' gains. Daily reflection upon practice and trialling ideas to support ongoing transition when opportunities emerge have become a sustainable goal in the early childhood team's programming due to the benefits perceived by stakeholders in the early learning centre.

Early childhood coordinator's voice

"We've made transitions more of a priority – this project made us feel we had permission to modify and improve on good things to make them great."



Outdoor environment reflective of the coastal environment familiar to the local children.

Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

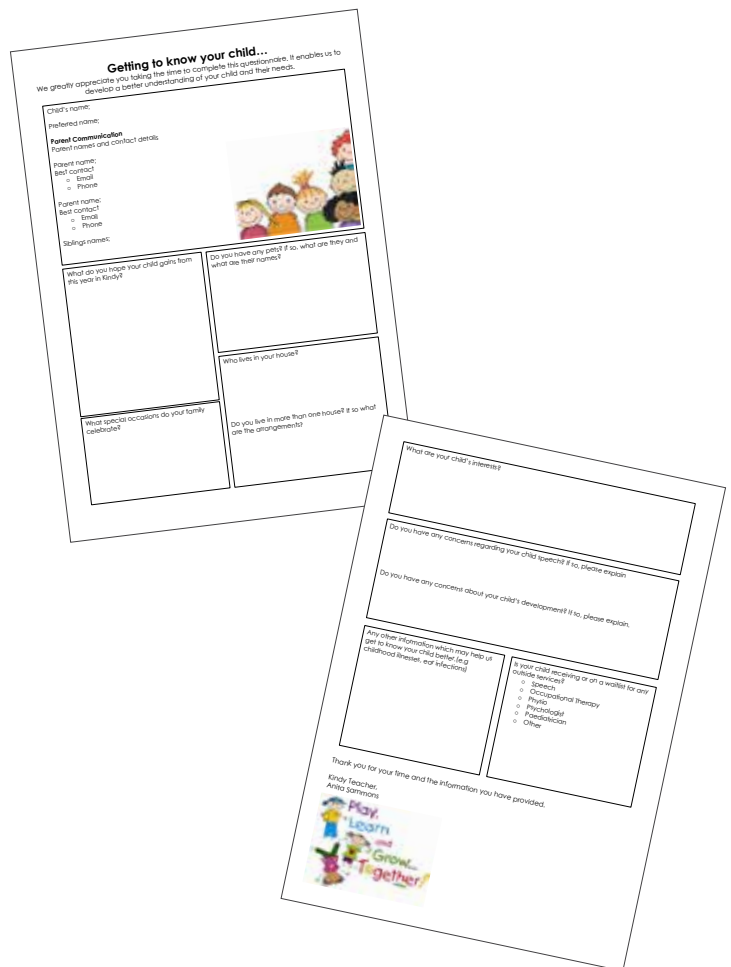
The school had a sudden and unexpected number of children enrol on the first day which placed some pressures on the transition. The shared vision and collaboration among the teacher, early years leader and educational assistants that had emerged in response to discussions about the nature and impact of transitions upon children and their families prior to school commencement in 2022 cemented a strong foundation for finding flexible, child-focussed solutions. School structures such as class numbers can be difficult to negotiate at the beginning of the year and adapting to this, the decision was made to split the numbers to make two classes. Although the class split was enrolment dependent, the impression to families was that their concerns had been heard by their teacher and school leadership. Comments from parents also showed a strong and invested parent community who felt personally connected to the school and particularly to their child’s class and teacher.

During the class adjustment, issues arose for individual children and their families, such as concerns about noise or of their child becoming tired, or of being separated from friends when the classes split. In each instance, the staff responded with empathy and practical solutions. A positive outcome of being presented with a situation that required flexibility and responsiveness to all stakeholders was the shift toward a more collaborative free-thinking approach to programming. This was noted by the early childhood leader in the school, who said, “seeing the teacher from last year, where she was really wondering how she was going to do it, and seeing her progress and be so calm when faced with the new issues – her mindset has changes completely... So much more flexible and goes with the flow. The transitions project has really helped her know she’s not alone.”

More broadly, the early childhood leadership team reflected upon the conversations they had held with staff from other schools at the transitions project professional development days. They acknowledged the diversity of transitions and the need for them to be uniquely designed for each school. The Kindergarten teacher as she approached the 2022 school commencement, spoke of knowing there will always be new issues and their practices can evolve and change each year in response.

Conclusion

The Professional Development days were affirming for the early childhood leadership team. Talking with colleagues across schools provided an opportunity to share successes alongside the strategies and processes that they had tried but had been less successful. This fostered a positive mindset toward transitions and the teachers stated they realised they “we’re not alone in this.” The team discovered things “we thought we were doing right, were actually a bit off base” and “brought things to our attention we hadn’t thought of before.” Most significantly, the team shifted from adult-focussed thinking about transitions to child-focussed experience. This shift in perspective evolved through use of the design-based thinking process which gave the staff opportunities to consider the viewpoints of all stakeholders and adopt their own innovative approach. Ultimately, the teacher discovered and shared the children’s FoI and FoK in the practical, ongoing context of being a child as both a learner and as a member of a unique family, upholding the school’s values and ethos.



Questionnaire sent home to parents to find out about the children.

Carmel School

School Context

Carmel School offers the best of both Jewish and General education, invigorating students with positive Jewish identity while empowering them with the knowledge and values to become successful and contributing 21st century global citizens. With 448 students and 100 staff, the school provides extensive opportunities, whilst ensuring children receive individual attention and support. The school has an ICSEA of 1137 with 16% of students with a language background other than English. The Carmel experience is empathetic, academically rigorous, of high quality and grounded within the practices and traditions of Modern Orthodox Judaism and Zionism (Carmel website). The Ashley Schaffer Early Learning Centre (ELC) consists of Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year one classes. The central area in the Ashley Schaffer Early Learning Centre is called the Kikar, 'the meeting place' in Hebrew. It is also used to display artwork and constructions. Each year level has two streams with classrooms able to be opened to a shared space. The ELC includes a Kosher kitchen and large outdoor play space. The early childhood program recognises that collaboration between students, teachers and families is important. The early childhood handbook states that the aim of the early childhood program is to "nurture the development of the whole child as a self-motivated, life-long and active learner within the ethos of Modern orthodox Judaism."

Transition Point

Kindergarten Context

The transition class in this case study is the Kindergarten class for children who have turned four by 30th June. Kindergarten children can attend for half or full days for the whole week Monday to Friday. The full day Kindergarten program starts at 8.15am and finishes at 3.00pm. The half day program has children collected at lunch time. The usual Kindergarten timetable is described as a varied program with all children attending at least three days per week with the aim to foster inquiry and exploration whilst using explicit teaching for literacy and numeracy. Indoor time is free flowing with children choosing what they would like to do. In the Kindergarten class children participate in regular Jewish Studies sessions. Carmel ELC students are active participants in the planning, execution, and evaluation of their individual learning journeys. The indoor environment consists of multiple learning spaces including a sociodramatic space, construction, puzzles, books, investigation, easels, light table, small world play and mark making area. There are two mat spaces and tables set up for activities such as beading and playdough. The space uses natural materials with light and plants. The environment is warm and welcoming with natural materials, a world map to show where families are from, a role play space that reflects the Jewish culture with the inclusion of recipe books and artefacts,

information for parents is displayed around the room, and furniture represents that of home e.g. a dining table is used for drawing table with dining chairs and a couch is in the room. A welcome to country book and acknowledgment of country poster for parents to read is located near the entry to the room.

The first day of Kindergarten in 2021 and 2022 began with a staggered start with half the class attending for a day each to allow for a higher staff to children ratio. Parents were invited to stay until the bell rang to settle their child. The environment reflected children's interests and ways of learning and allowed time for staff to play with children and have conversations to get to know them. In the first week children participated in music, mat time, indoor and outdoor play, Jewish Studies, and story time. Bathroom routines were taught, and children had morning tea and lunch together with staff. Children had free choice during indoor and outdoor time. The Jewish culture and language were embedded in all aspects of the program and environment. In the afternoon children had a recharge time for 45 minutes where they could sleep or rest as they listened to music. Outdoor play followed, then children prepared to go home. From Day Two the children attended the days as per their selected programme. The routine was similar to the first day.

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

The Transforming Transitions project for Carmel School was thought to be affirming of current practices which was "tweaked and honed" (School leader). Reflecting upon the project's three Design Principles for transitions, the school drew primarily upon the first principle: 'Belonging' and 'Being' to support strong connections. As Kindergarten is the first entry point to the school, developing children's and families' sense of belonging in the school environment always had and continued to drive changes in the transition. As mentioned by the teacher, the principles "helped us consider more deeply what we do and why".

Teacher's voice – Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity

"I didn't use the terms FoI and FoK before and I have to say I still find I have to stop and think to get my head around exactly what each is. They are things we definitely consider, and we think about, but without using those labels. They are useful terms and make one think more deeply."

Design Principle 1: 'Belonging' and 'being' to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of identity and knowledge: invest in the 'virtual backpacks' children bring through intentional planning.

Although the teachers were not familiar with the terms FoK and FoI, Carmel School focused on developing trust with families and children and regularly used their knowledge of children and families to support the transition. Families at Carmel School are predominantly Jewish, and the environment and daily routines acknowledged this with Hebrew environmental print displayed, Jewish themed books in the book corner, the singing of songs in Hebrew and English, a Kosher kitchen and seven periods of Jewish studies allocated per week. The teacher commented that photos were taken of children during Orientation Day and displayed on the first day "to create a sense of belonging for each child." A world map was displayed to show where children were born, and an Aboriginal welcome sign 'Kaya' was displayed at the entry.

In early January an email was sent to parents to welcome and inform them of housekeeping things for the start of school such as what to bring, the opening and finishing times and photos of the staff in readiness for their child's first day. Also emailed was a 'Welcome to Kindergarten' questionnaire gathering information that assisted the staff to get to know each child. Questions that gathered funds of knowledge and identity information about children and families included:

- write three adjectives to describe your child,
- who are the members in your family including pets?
- what language are spoken at home?
- what are some of your child's interests, passions, and favourite things to do?
- what do they find challenging, and what else would you like us to know about your child?



Welcome sign near the entrance to the classroom.

This information was reviewed by the teacher and informed the planning and setting up of the environment for the transition. Added to this was information the teacher had observed about children's movement and interests on an Orientation Day the children attended at the end of 2021. The teacher commented "we started with Duplo animals as the children loved this on orientation day and one child was really interested in dinosaurs, so we included dinosaurs in the environment." This information was revisited once the children were more settled in the Kindergarten program to look again at children's interests and how this can be included in the program. The Kindergarten teacher commented that "being thoughtful and intentional about the provocations and invitations set out for children is important" in relation to children's interests. Whilst considering what is on the questionnaire, the staff also observe closely to see children's engagement with provocations set out and honour those in the planning process. The teacher commented, "The current cohort is loving gardening and so setting the garden up and talking about sustainable practices is something we find parents wouldn't necessarily think about or write [in the questionnaire]. We find they tend to write the more obvious things". The teacher also commented how she "...used this information to alleviate children's anxieties about starting school. There was one little person who appeared to be quite apprehensive about starting, he was from over east, and he was really interested in cars and trucks, so we made sure we had cars and trucks out."

Teacher's voice

"We just try and be really thoughtful about the provocations and invitations that we set out. We try and base these on what we know about each child."

Respect the child's right to 'be' a child: Affirm each child's identity and sense of safety.

Carmel Kindergarten staff have always prioritised affirming each child's identity and sense of safety. By using homely furniture, the home environment is simulated. For example, a dining table and chairs were used as the drawing table and a couch was present in the room. The environment is warm, welcoming with natural materials and light carefully used to create a calm atmosphere. A change in 2022 saw information gathered earlier in the year via the parent questionnaire about children's favourite songs and was utilised to create a playlist for fitness and dance time from the beginning of the year. The previous year this had been done in the middle of the year but reflecting on how to use children's FoK in various ways this information was used to affirm each child's identity. The children responded positively and loved hearing their songs. The use of Bibliotherapy (using literature to connect with children's feelings) and a new setting was a practice observed throughout the research project to assist children to establish their 'school' identity. For example, a story about first days was read to Kindergarten children and related to their own feelings and experience of their first day at Kindergarten.

The teacher also used the story to model what to do if you need help at Kindergarten, what to do if you cannot read your name and how to put your hand up. Everything in the story was linked back to the children's Kindergarten context to help them feel safe.

Teacher's voice

"Everything that we do to transition children works towards that familiarity which brings about that sense of belonging and being."

Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connection between children, families, educators, school, and community.

Carmel Kindergarten's transition program provided extensive opportunities for staff to cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connections between children, families, educators, school, and the community. Several events were held in the year prior to the transition to support children's and families' transition into the school.

In July of the year prior, a 'Peek and Picnic' was held for community members on the school grounds. This provided an opportunity to meet potential and interested new families and for families to familiarise themselves with staff and the school's early childhood environments.

When children enrolled, a parent interview was held with the Head of the primary school. For enrolled families, a parent information evening was held in November. Leadership, teachers, and support staff met the families and shared information about their roles and the Kindergarten philosophy. The parent information evening orientated parents to the play-based pedagogy used in the Kindergarten, set the tone for parent and school relationships to work in synergy for the benefit of the child and families, and provided initial information about the development of social, literacy, numeracy, and Hebrew skills. A typical day in Kindergarten

was described with week one expectations outlined in relation to the staggered start, and requirements such as school bag, drink bottles, morning tea and lunch were explained. Opportunities for parent involvement in the Kindergarten were identified and an Early Learning Centre handbook was also provided. Questions and concerns from families were treated in an authentic, purposeful manner with parents also welcome to speak with school staff.

In the last week of school the year before starting, a one-and-a-half-hour orientation session was held for parents and children to explore the Kindergarten setting and once again meet the Kindergarten team. In addition to this, children were invited to paint bark and honey nuts which were later displayed on a hanging branch. The teacher commented that children liked to see something they had engaged in on the orientation day in the room on their first day and that it helped to create a sense of belonging.

A significant change in 2022 was the addition of a space set up for parents, created as a lounge area with couches and tub chairs. The kitchenette was set up for parents to make coffee and tea. The space was for parents to stay, congregate and chat rather than dropping and leaving. The teacher commented "The (lounge) space is more about parents having a place in space to belong. I think it's really important that the families have that sense of belonging to help a smooth transition." A kidlets program (similar to a playgroup) is also run by one of the Jewish Studies educators in this space once a week.

Once the school year started the teacher emailed first day photos and then again at the end of the first week with a newsletter explaining what the children have enjoyed and engaged in. Older siblings were permitted to come down to the Kindergarten to say hello to younger siblings. The Principal was also in the room at pick up and drop off time to interact with parents.



Home style furniture such as this dining table is used for the writing table to reflect the home environment.



Hanging branch completed by the children at orientation events and hung ready for the first day.

Design Principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear, consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families, and professional colleagues.

Using clear, consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families and professional colleagues was a core focus for the school and continued to be throughout the project as small adjustments were made. In the week leading up to the start of school, the teacher posted a welcome letter and pack to children which also included top tips from last year's Kindergarten children. In 2021, two days before school started an email was sent to parents with an eBook of the classroom environment. This was changed in 2022 to include a video of the classroom where the teachers walked around and filmed each area and spoke to the children about what they could do in that space. This was very successful with positive parent feedback received. Interviews were conducted with families if needed e.g. children with additional needs.

Teacher's voice

"We had a video tour instead of making up an eBook and that worked really well. The parents loved that. And the children really liked seeing us and hearing our voices."

Weekly newsletters describing what the children had been engaging in and learning about were emailed home to families. The newsletters included many photos and described the focus of the teaching program. For example, the first newsletter described how the children had been exploring and engaging with their new environment, making new friends, getting to know their teachers and how staff had focused on getting to know the children and what their interests are. These newsletters continued to be sent home to parents each week to establish high levels of engagement with families. Informal conversations are also had with parents at drop-off and pick-up and transition information is shared with colleagues. The teacher commented to one child and their parent as they arrived "Wow! You brought avocado seeds! Shall we put them in water? Maybe they will grow!"



Strategy to support links between school and home.

Kindies, Kindies
what do you see?

A special ebook to help welcome you to your new Kindy classroom.

Hello Kindy friends ...

We are looking forward to seeing you at Kindy very soon!

Did you know that when you come to Kindy you will have a hook with your name to hang your bag up and your very own **green** tray to store your hat and other bits and pieces?



You do not need to worry if you cannot recognise your name yet ... your teachers love to help you and are always there!!!



Examples pages of the eBook emailed to children and families.

Collaboratively design a transparent blueprint of the 'transition game plan' that is culturally responsive to children, and families, and respects the values of the school's ethos.

The transition process was carefully thought about in the Kindergarten in ways that were culturally responsive to children, families, and the ethos of the school.

Factors considered included:

- being transparent and authentic,
- developing trust with children and families,
- providing as much information as possible to help parents navigate the transition process,
- providing information for children about what to expect to minimise anxieties, and
- building relationships with children and families all thought to support a successful transition.

The school worked to get to know families and children well through multiple avenues of communication. The leader commented that "We know our families really well. We get to know them very quickly." Parent feedback is sought in the school through a parent survey sent out later in the year about the transition to ensure family needs are being addressed.

COVID-19 brought changes to the schools' transition plan as some families were isolated due to border closures or isolation protocols preventing them from starting the school year. The school staff responded to this by posting transition packs to families and conducting Zoom calls to welcome them and their child to the school and Kindergarten. The teacher commented, "I think we handled it well. But there was still that constant thinking and concern about all these families in different contexts."

A truly *fabulous* start...

The first days of Kindy are definitely a super *exciting* time for everyone however, they can also be somewhat over-whelming and sometimes even a just a 'teeny' bit frightening! Not for our new Kindy friends though! We are SO incredibly proud of how ALL our gorgeous new Kindies have embraced this new adventure.

It has been incredibly heart warming to observe the children exploring and engaging in their new environment, reconnecting with familiar friends AND more-so beginning to *make connections* with their teachers and brand new friends alike. Spending quality time 'just playing' together this week has allowed us to start to really get to know each of our precious Kindies; what they enjoy doing and what their interests are, what they are curious about, what makes them feel safe and also nervous ... we cannot wait to learn more about our amazing class next week as we continue this *shared* journey.

The first newsletter sent home to parents to share the children's first week at kindy.

Design Principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

Staff focused their attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families. To adapt and innovate flexibly and respond to changing priorities of stakeholders continued reflection is occurring. The teacher pondered on how information is shared with parents. She questioned, "Would it be worth doing two information nights with one night, outlining what to expect, how to prepare your child for coming to Kindergarten, what type of bag to buy and practical things families can do over the holidays. Then the second one a bit later in term one to talk about the program. I'm still not sure if what we currently do is information overload." In addition to this, the staff reflected upon the way the parent questionnaire information inviting parent/family feedback to evaluate the transition process was collected and commented they had to spend time reminding parents to engage in this. A suggestion made was that perhaps the questions used to collect information about the transition be reviewed to elicit more detailed feedback. The leader reflected, "Relationships are key to gain trust."

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

Carmel staff were committed to the project with the view that it would be affirming whilst also reflective. The school was keen to refine its practice to improve the transition for children and families. The leader commented, "You can get into a rut about how you're doing things and unless you reflect and get exposed to other ideas from other places you just think yours is best practice. It helps you to be settled with what you are providing – affirming. We wanted to know if what we do is enough or more than enough."

As the leader commented, "We are very happy with what we already do but we hope to also gain insight as to how we can improve." The Kindergarten teacher plans for the transition collaboratively with other colleagues and the leadership team with her expertise recognised. The school leaders have the utmost confidence in the Kindergarten staff to plan and organise the transitions. Conversations with the leadership team inform them of what is occurring. The leader commented, "I trust them implicitly (staff).

We will have discussions about what they're doing but it is completely in their domain. I do not interfere. I will go down and be an extra pair of hands if needed."

A recent decision to change the school timetable pushed morning tea and lunches to later in the day. For the most part this did not apply to the Kindergarten context however, once a week they do have to follow it due to the timing of the Jewish Studies lesson. Staff found the children needed to eat earlier. Kindergarten staff were responsive to this and, included an additional snack time before morning tea. The school is responsive to families but also measured and targeted. As the leader commented "If we are seeing that there is a challenge then we'll address that. We're not going to throw out everything that we know is working but we'll add layers on if we need to."

Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

During the project, the school was faced with the challenge of COVID-19 disrupting the transition which called for flexibility and innovative thinking to ensure the needs of all families and children were met during the transitions. In 2021, the teachers conducted optional Zoom meetings with each child/family as they could not begin the school year in week one due to COVID-19 lockdowns. The teacher and leader commented that this was very successful and replicated a home visit but was less intrusive for families. The Zoom meetings gave a window to children's identities and offered intimate shared experiences where it was just the child, their family and teachers. This also created a relationship of trust with parents. The teachers decided to continue with this in 2022 for families that wanted to, and most families requested this. Two days were set aside to complete a 15 minute chat with each family. The teacher commented, "even though we had to sacrifice preparation time we felt it was really worthwhile."

Teacher's voice

"The children were so excited to take us around their house and to bring their school bag to show us, to show us their favourite cuddle toy. We got a real sense of what they were interested in. You could see if they've got pets, you could see the dynamic with their little brother or sister in this tiny little snapshot of 15 minutes."

In 2022 the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted transitions again. Organic conversations that would happen with families as they dropped off and picked up children did not occur as parents were not allowed into the classroom. The teacher identified one positive from this was the sense of having less chaos in the classroom in the mornings without so many parents and younger siblings. Additionally, four families were unable to start in week one as they were delayed interstate and overseas by COVID-19 Pandemic border protocols. This meant that staff were still settling children and families later in the term. As the teacher described "we had to be flexible as there was still that constant thinking about and concern for all these families in different contexts and how we could cater for them." The leader also recognised "The challenges of not being able to have our parents on-site has added a layer of difficulty we needed to respond to."

Conclusion

Carmel School chose to be a part of the Transitions project to affirm what they do well and to reflect on what could be inspired to ensure a smooth transition occurred for children and families. The design principles provided a framework for the school to view transitions as a tool for change. The project reaffirmed the positive impact the Kindergarten's strong focus on establishing relationships with families and children, finding out about children's backgrounds, and incorporating this in their planning had on children's and families' experience of the transition. Importantly, the project assisted the school to reflect on new practices trialled such as Zoom meetings with families during COVID-19 to see benefits beyond the COVID-19 challenge. The introduction of the new terms FoK and FoI provided the language to frame the efforts the staff made to find out about children's and families' backgrounds to create belonging in the school environment.

Teacher's voice – what did they see differently

"The project has made us think and reflect more deeply and authentically about the transitions, about what and how we're doing it."

Leader's voice

"I think moving forward we will do whatever we need to do to make it work for our families. We are constantly reflecting."



Open indoor learning design with inclusion of accessible, social play options.

Perth College

School Context

Perth College is the oldest independent Anglican boarding school for girls in Western Australia with over 1000 students currently enrolled and accommodating 100 boarders from regional Western Australia and overseas. The school campus includes the Founders Centre, a purpose build centre for early learning, Pre-Kindergarten to Year 3. Perth College also offers a playgroup (PC Playtime), for boys and girls aged birth-3 and their parents on Monday and Wednesday mornings. Attendance at Pre-Kindergarten is flexible, and parents can opt for their children to attend 3, 4 or 5 days per week from 9.00am to 2.00pm. Pre-Kindergarten children must be 3 by the 30th of June to enrol in that year. In addition, the school also offers an Out of School Care Program for children from the ages of 3 to 12.

Transition Point

Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten

The Founders Centre for early learning advocates a playful, inquiry-oriented approach to support the development of skills in problem-solving, creativity and critical thinking and prioritises collaboration with caregivers. Pre-Kindergarten takes place in a converted house and presents as homely with timber furniture, large windows and plentiful natural light. Large double doors connect the indoor/outdoor spaces. There are 20 children (both girls and boys) in the Kindergarten cohort and Pre-Kindergarten settings. In this project in 2021 the Kindergarten teacher and the early years' leader were the staff directly involved. In 2022 the transition point was Pre-Kindergarten and the teacher, and two educational assistants were newly employed.

Our story

Transition into Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten at Perth College was understood by the early childhood team as an opportunity for building relationships with families and for securing a stable entry to the school for children. The Transitions project offered an opportunity to gain fresh insight and refine practice. The school practices a 'looping' approach whereby the Pre-Kindergarten teacher moves with the children to become their Kindergarten teacher the following year. In 2021, the staff reflected upon the practices associated with the transition from Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten. These included staggered entry of smaller groups for half days across the first week, processes for parent morning departure and for the introduction of specialist lessons, and accommodations for children struggling with the length of the school day. In 2022, their focus moved to transition into the Pre-Kindergarten, commencing a new 'loop' with the Pre-Kindergarten teacher set to follow the children into Kindergarten in 2023.



A home like learning environment.

During the professional development days, the teachers considered how gaining further information about the children's funds of knowledge and funds of identity might be instrumental in any adjustments that might be made and used this perspective for redesigning an approach that tapped into parent and child anticipation and experience of Kindergarten, facilitated informal opportunities for conversation with parents including personal phone calls to welcome and 'check in' with new parents and adjustments to the information gathered at enrolment and how this was shared.

Teacher's voice – Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity

Were they terms you used before and are they terms you would now use?

"Probably not necessarily in those terms, but definitely would have thought about them. In the planning and establishment of a program. Yeah, I think it's good to have a purpose."

Leader's voice – Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity

How important is knowing about FoK and FoI?

"I think it's useful to understand the context that the child is coming from."

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

The teachers at the school changed during the second year so that 2022 saw a new teacher engage in the project. Whilst this presented some challenges it also brought new ideas to the project to transform the transition.

Design principle 1: Being and belonging to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of knowledge and identity: invest in the 'virtual backpacks' children bring through intentional planning.

The staff involved in the project had changed some of the questions at the enrolment interview to gather more information about children and family's FoK and FoI. At Perth College all children and their parent/carers are invited to visit, talk with the Director of Junior School, and then have a tour of the facilities. The Director of Junior School spoke of asking for information around children's interests, their strengths and families' aspirations for their children at the school. She was clear in saying, "I make sure it's not about tasks, it's not about being able to hold a pencil. It's about who they are as a person." Additionally, they ask about food allergies, if parents/carers expect children to eat all their food at snack time or lunch, developmental milestones, independence in toileting and if they require an afternoon nap. This information is passed to the teacher so that it could be used in thinking about children's transition into Pre-Kindergarten. Of particular attention was knowledge and skill in being independent in the bathroom, so the teacher and assistants knew how much support might be needed.

Teacher's voice

"The more you get to know them (children and families) the better you can tweak things and make adjustments in the learning environment to suit that family." – teacher from the previous year

Another strategy to gather more information about children and their families in 2022 came in the form of a family folder that the Kindergarten teachers had utilised. The early years leaders said one of the challenges had been to collect information that is "quite current" and many of the orientation strategies had been focussed on the end of the year before children started. The new Pre-Kindergarten teacher, said that

she always paid attention to what interested children and spoke with most families about their children. In the first week of school, she and the education assistants had a list of the children's names and were noting interests and capabilities. She said, "Already at the end of the week, I know something about each child that we now use in our planning for next week." She then went on to describe how having this list prompted all the adults to remind children what they had done or thought about previously.

The teacher commented she thought that finding out about children's FoK and FoI was important especially "for the children who haven't separated from their family in the past to go to a care environment, I'm finding that those families probably need a more tailored transition." Family cultures were something that she believed she did well and embedded in her planning as she had worked at an International School which, like Perth College, had a student body from "different diverse backgrounds". The strategy that the teacher thought was most effective to gain information about children was conversations with parents/carers. She did not see the need for families to write it all out and, explained, "when I sit with somebody, and they say that their child loves dinosaurs and gives you a little story and puts it in context. It's so much better than a piece of paper." One parent commented, while it was important to know about the children, she "wanted it to be useful", adding "as long as it was reasonable – don't want an encyclopedia".

The staff involved in the project had discussed the viability and the evidence related to using teacher home visits as a strategy to find out more about children's FoK and FoI. However, this has not been trialled due to staff movement and the COVID-19 pandemic. What did work in 2021 were individual online meetings with each child and family. The children were able to see the teacher and the teacher could meet the child and parent/carer in the context of their home, at times including siblings, pets, favourite toys and a tour of the home. Children were treated as the most knowledgeable person about their family and family photos were bought in and placed at child height around the room. Often staff asked children about their photo.



Family photos positioned at child height around the room to prompt conversation and support sharing of FoI.



Attention to detail to create a home away from home.

Respect the child's right to 'be' a child: Affirm each child's identity and sense of safety.

Both teachers in the project across the two years believed that a sense of safety for all children was essential for an effective transition. The first teacher described developing an environment that connected children to the Pre-Kindergarten as she said, "It's all about the attention to detail, making it feel like a home away from home, having little treasures they love, things they feel connected too." A looping strategy had been used to assist children in their transition. In the first year of the project the Kindergarten was the transition point under consideration. The teacher and the education assistant had followed the children from Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten and when the children moved to Pre-Primary, The teacher would start again with the Pre-Kindergarten children. In this way the staff got to know the children and families well as they worked together for two years. The school also had a staggered entry into PK and K to ease the transition process with half days for the first week.

There were several strategies that had been implemented to affirm each child's identity and sense of safety. The family photos assisted this as the children were observed picking up the photos and looking at them during the day. For some, the photo was taken to activities and became a touchstone of comfort. Another challenge had been rethinking the timetable for specialist classes. On the staff's examination of what was best for children, it was decided that the children would stay in their own setting in the first few weeks rather than move to a non-familiar site with a non-familiar adult and the teacher would stay with them. The early years leader said, "It's too many different people in one day due to timetabling." Second was a review of the daily timetable where the teacher considered having a smooth flowing day to be important to children's sense of safety. It was her view that for very young children routines and transitions within the day should be used sparingly. She said, "... too many transitions in the



An environment with little treasures children love and can feel connected to.

day would disrupt the children too much." Furthermore, she decided she would not pressure the children to come to the mat. She explained some of the children "would get upset" if she tried to "get everyone on the mat" in these early days. She considered children's emotional anxiety was a factor that can disrupt transitions and noted this often came from changing "the flow of the day- like 'we're going to stop what we're doing'. That's when I see those children who do have some anxiety. You know, like it's almost like flicking a switch". The teacher also had fluid snack times to allow the children to connect something tangible to home, even if it was very early in the day.

Teacher's voice

"I think that was probably an anxiety thing, and to get the lunch box out and connect with home in that way. "What has mummy or daddy put inside it?" "What has my mum?" – so they were talking about home... And you could see that once the children had eaten, they were comfortable and ready to play. Whereas others were quite happy to go off and play straight away."

The social emotional atmosphere of the centre was also seen to assist in children's sense of safety. There were several reasons attributed to this. One was the size of the class. Entry was staggered in the first week allowing the teacher and assistant to spend time with small groups of children. The teacher in 2022 said in the early days of the year, "really the group was no bigger than probably about 10 each day" because some children enrolled have not yet turned three. Part of the safe emotional atmosphere was created by the interactions of the staff. The teacher when opening the door to children and families was noted as being welcoming, calm and happy. She also bent down to children to address them face to face and after the first day, with many children seen to give her a hug in greeting. Being independent in the

toilet was a point of concern for some families and children with parents asking questions on arrival on their first day. The teacher accepted their concerns and reassured them. She said, “That’s ok, I can help” and “many children are still learning”. It was noted that the parents looked visibly calmer at the teacher’s reassuring words. Even though some children had toileting “accidents” these were dealt with by staff very discretely and calmly. The teachers were also proactive in supporting children who either did not know how to join in with others or may have been feeling a little anxious. For example, the teacher took one child by hand and gently guide her to the far side of the outdoor space where two other children were playing as this is what the child had been watching.

Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connection between children, families, educators, school and community.

Relationships that built connections between children, their families, teachers and the school community were points of attention in this project and supported the ethos of the school. Several strategies were developed or continued into 2022 that assisted in the implementation of this design principle. These included a new idea of giving parent/carers a coffee voucher for the School café to encourage families to stay on campus during the transition mornings and positively connect with the school community and other families. The staff had also planned a picnic for Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten families as a connection point to compliment the “play date” just before school started. The “play date” is an occasion before school starts for families and children to come to the centre to play and connect with others.

Early years leader’s voice

“They’re not just dropping off and go, and then feeling worried about their child. We introduced something just as simple as a voucher for our café on site, encouraging parents then to go, once they’ve done a drop off, and meet parents who are in the same circumstance.”

Regular conversations with children and families were used to cultivate relationships. This started with the Director of Junior School at the enrolment interview and continued with the Pre-Kindergarten teaching staff. The staff were described as upbeat and welcoming of parents at the end of a busy day. The teacher was observed, bending down to children, smiling while saying she would see the children tomorrow. She also used proximity to calm and build relationships with children. On the first full day one child was visibly tired, teary and irritable, the teacher put a comforting arm around the child who then sat in the educator’s lap and cuddled her while watching the others play. The relationships of older siblings and their friends were also encouraged, being permitted to visit and play with the children in their morning break time. On one instance seven older children (Year 4 students) joined the play in the playground and stayed for 20 minutes. The children were happy to see them, and staff also connected with them.



Focussed spaces for connecting to the natural world.

Design principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families and professional colleagues.

The timing and purpose of communication with families about transitions had been a focus in the project. At the end of the year, in the November before school started, the School held an Information Evening facilitated by the classroom teachers who will be teaching in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten in the following year, so parents could find out more information and ask questions. The event included a supper so that the parents could stay and talk with the educators and engage with one another. Importantly, it was a starting point for the class teacher to begin to support families through the transition process.

Early years leader's voice

“Trying to make sure that that communication comes out well in advance so that parents have a sense of what was going to happen with their child at the beginning of the year.”

In addition to providing a coffee voucher to families on the first day, another strategy was planned (but not executed) to communicate the transition process through a visual model. It was noted in the teachers planning document to “work with Marketing to share the Transition Action Plan via a visual interpretation (e.g., infographic) to ensure that all stakeholders were aware of the research and intentions behind the transition program.” This model would then be used in all future parent information evenings or events.

The new teacher for 2022 also held a Parent Information Night early in the term and discussed in her presentation topics such as: child independence in the centre, the indoor and outdoor learning environment, specialist teachers and a day in the life of the Pre-Kindergarten child. If parents could not attend, then the PowerPoint was sent home to them. One parent who received the presentation said, that it “canvasses everything, every minutia you could think of that answered my questions.”

The teacher, described the ways in which she communicated with families apart from the everyday conversations at pick up and drop off times. She also sent each family a welcome letter which explained the ways in which to contact her, a little of her previous experience and family life, with photos of staff so children would recognise them when they entered.

Welcome Letter Excerpt

Over the first couple of weeks, we will be getting to know your child, I understand you may want to share information or ask questions to support your child prior to their first day and we welcome these. Please feel free to email me (email address) if this is the case. Be assured should I have any concerns or feel your child needs additional support during the transition phase, I will be in touch.

When you arrive at school, please show your child around, help them to make their name tag if you have time, find their pigeon hole and organise their hat, recess, and drink bottle. Both you and your child are free to move around and engage with the environment. Due to the number of children commencing please refrain from discussing your child at this time, as we will be trying to ensure all children have our undivided attention. A bell will ring, then please say goodbye. Please begin now to let them know that this will always be the time for Mummy or Daddy to leave. I'm sure there may be some tears and we will contact you if they do not settle.



Environment prepared for arrival routines.

She also used a communication book at the front door for parent/carers to relay information pertinent for that day and let parents know she would always answer any email questions on Fridays. The school also used an online software program that allowed families to receive updates and newsletters. One parent explained “there had been heaps” of communication with the school including the use of “...an amazing online app, constantly get updates and newsletters.” Every week on Friday the teacher sent home a “newsy letter” and parents were made aware of this on the day to look on the online app.

Teacher’s voice

“I think some parents, from feedback, get overwhelmed with (name of online app) every day. It can be a bit of a distraction. What we noticed previously is that they can actually stop looking.”

The practice of active listening to parents to tailor transitions to fit the child and family was something that both teachers and the early years’ leader spoke about. The teachers’ dedication to building responsive partnerships with parents was exemplified in an exchange which supported a parent with a child with additional needs to leave their child for a shorter period in anticipation of the child’s need for additional rest. The parent had planned to wait in the car on a hot day but was reassured by the teacher that phone communication between them would be timely and would prioritise her child’s additional needs. She also reassured the parent that her needs for safety and comfort were also valued and supported by the school.

Collaboratively design a shared blueprint of the ‘transition game plan’ that is culturally responsive to children, families and respects the values of the school’s ethos.

The early years’ leader spoke of tailoring transitions to meet the requirements of families that she learnt about when first meeting the family and child. The change brought about by the project was described by the leader as listening more to parents/carers and their concerns about the transition process. However, she believed this needed to be formalised with adjustments made to better reflect what she had learned from the project about what information would be meaningful to best support the needs of parents and young children through the initial and ongoing transition through school. She said of the process, “We’ve tended to work individually with a family to suit that particular child in that context. And a lot of that has come through the interview process. On reflection, she was concerned about the sustainability of this practice.

Early years leader’s voice

“So, it’s not a process as such that someone else might replicate, it’s more my being flexible in the moment if I’m sensing that a family is feeling concerned about transition. So, we probably need to formalise that a little more.”

The staff who participated in the project also thought knowledge of children’s family or community cultural practices was information that could assist in transitions. In the enrolment interview one of the questions centred on “what family is supporting the child?” Staff thought it was important to know “where the child is coming from” and that many families don’t have support. She said, “More and more children are coming from scenarios where the parents are the only caregivers there are.” Understanding this she acknowledged the school’s role in building a better understanding of how families try to manage and operate in their unique circumstances and to be sensitive to each family’s situation.



Play provocation connecting the children’s experiences beyond school.

Design principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

In this project three main design principles were developed for all the schools. However, the project team at Perth College also developed their own, as they wanted to focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change. They started by documenting the overarching outcomes of the transition model and then added their own design principles. There are:

Overarching outcomes of the model (as described by PK-PP educators):

- Educators are intentional and consistent in their approach to vertical and horizontal transitions, with the child at the centre of all decision making.
- PC becomes a ‘home away from home.’
- Children feel safe, settled, regulated and aware of the journey ahead of them.
- Families feel valued and well prepared for the transition process.

Perth College Design Principles – made in collaboration with notosh:

- Prioritise purpose when planning the process
- Create consistent experiences for all
- Provide opportunities for parents to participate
- Build deep and strong connections

This planning and discussion brought about the thinking of developing a statement of intent. This statement would describe the ways in which documenting would be undertaken for “intentional planning for vertical and horizontal transitions (e.g. use of a visual timetable, bibliotherapy, social stories, leaving adequate time for transitions etc.)” (PC planning grid).

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

The early years leader believed that for an effective transition, ensuring the staff working with children had the expertise of an early childhood educator was key. It was apparent that having the early years leader involved in the project from the beginning allowed for deeper conversations and commitment to actioning the project with alignment to school policy documents. For example, participants described the discussions that centred on “an ideal model for transition for our students.” This was discussed in terms of what could be implemented over time and included it in our Quality Improvement Plan. Connecting the project to other work was a clear way of committing and keeping the focus on transitions.

The Pre-Kindergarten staff were all new in the second year of the project and the early years leader described how the project had been a way to focus the conversation on how to support staff who had not previously worked with very young children. Some conversations among staff were around getting children quickly into routine however the transition project supported the existing practice of inviting children and supporting their independence in the early stages of transition. To assist this idea, the school had supported the project by providing an extra educational assistant in the first week of transition which assisted greatly with adult/child ratios and complemented the teacher’s practice. The teacher was also seen conversing with the assistant about the objectives of the day that had been co-developed with the children and displayed next to the mat. The conversation centred on pointing out to the children the ways in which they were fulfilling their objective, for example, to be happy and to play.

Teacher’s voice

“If child wanted me to go outside then (name of assistant) would slowly come inside, so there’s a very organic way that we move throughout the classroom.”

In the Transition project planning grid, the intention had been to present to the new staff members in the Junior School team the information from the project and how the principles could be applied to the early years to support students and families. The early years leader said that she thought the project had been valuable because it put transitions “at the forefront of my mind”. She saw the application of this project “beyond the age range that we were looking at for Transitions” and she was having discussions with other staff “around improving transitions from Year 6 to Year 7.” These discussions had also included transitions for “students of particular needs”. The early years leader supported staff in the transition process by being present and staying connected.

Director of the Junior School’s voice

“There was no discussion about it. I just go in and throw myself into it. It’s actually my joy of the day. Being able to just go and centre yourself and be part of something. And because you’re wearing heels in a leadership position, it wouldn’t make sense if you were tottering around in heels, so I just take them off when I go there.”



‘Real life’ resources to build authentic connections between home and school.

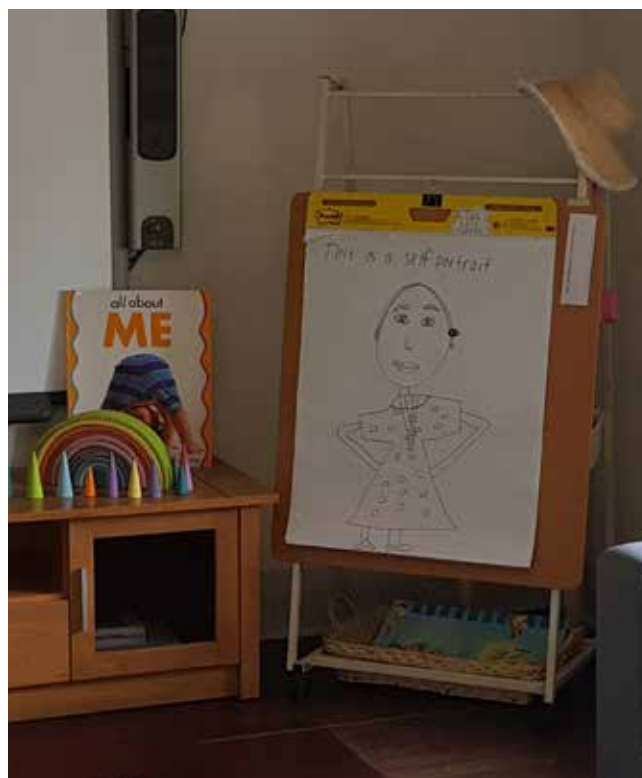
Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

It was the opinion of staff in the project that transitions required “tailoring to the individual” that included the priorities of stakeholders. The enrolment process was used to glean useful information to assist in implementing a smooth transition. The Director of Junior School described one family who followed an “attachment theory” of parenting and during the enrolment interview said they did not want to leave the child before they thought an attachment to the caregiver had been made. This had required some thinking through in COVID-19 pandemic conditions in the previous year when adults other than educators were not allowed inside rooms. They planned that the parent could be in the outdoor area as parent help and in that way, they were able to accommodate the priorities of this family.

Timetabling was a time-consuming process and challenging when managing a large school and several specialist teachers. The Director of Junior School spoke about adaptations to the lunch duty roster to provide greater continuity for the children and exposure to fewer staff. The Director of Junior School noted by addressing this need internally, between the Kindergarten, Pre-Kindergarten teachers and herself, they were more attuned to what children were eating, how they were feeling and could carry out parental wishes about what children were eating. She said, “You just can’t give people that knowledge when they’re coming in for twenty minutes. It means that it’s the early childhood educators that are with the children all the time.” They were also thinking through the movement to other spaces for specialist classes. In the early weeks, the specialists were asked to join the children in the centre to being to develop connections. It was described how many parents chose the school because of “the extra elements like music and cultural immersion”. Yet it was important for very young children “to be with their primary educators throughout the day” and “just crossing that threshold into a different space can effect some of the children negatively.” In response, “all of the specialist classes except library now take place in their classroom.”

Conclusion

The transitions project gave impetus to the early childhood team at Perth College to clarify their own unique transition principles and a clear process of their own approach to design-based thinking. This platform is intended to prompt examination of other transition points in the school, including the transition from Year 6 to 7. Importantly, the process enabled the staff to consider methods for building a more sustainable approach to ensuring quality transitions are maintained ongoing.



The teachers drawing of herself and a child creating her own self portrait.

Geraldton Grammar School

Context

Geraldton Grammar School is a co-educational college from Junior Kindy to Year 12 catering for 478 students. The school's ICSEA value is 1074 and has 17% of the student population with a language background other than English. The vision of Geraldton Grammar School is to provide "outstanding education and a strong sense of community, cultivating people of integrity, independence of mind and a love of learning." Primary school students have learning opportunities with specialist teachers in Mandarin, Physical Education, Visual Art and Music together with an extensive school camp program from Year 3.

Transition Point

Kindergarten Context

The transition point in this project was the entry into Kindergarten. There are two Kindergarten classes: a Junior Kindy catering for children who have turned three and a parent led play group. The transition class in this case study is the Kindergarten class for children who have turned three and half by the 30th of June 2021. Classes take up to 20 children. The Kindergarten philosophy frames children as "successful, capable and competent learners" (Geraldton Grammar Kindergarten Philosophy) where educators determine children's personalised learning goals. Geraldton Grammar recognises parents as children's first teachers and describes partnerships as vital to achieving the best outcomes for children. The Kindergarten Handbook describes play based learning, the Walker Learning Approach (WLA) and a focus on intellectual and social

learning. From Term 2 the Handbook describes "Bush Kindy" where children can play and explore natural bush areas in the school grounds. The usual Kindergarten timetable comprises four mornings a week and begins with hands-on play experiences called 'investigations' following the WLA. During Investigations children pursue their own interests. Each day during Investigations a roster of children take on the roles of reporter, photographer and focus children. Literacy and numeracy instruction are mainly teacher directed.

Teacher's voice – Funds of Knowledge (FoK) and Funds of Identity (Fol)

"No, I hadn't heard these terms before the project. It was nice to give a name to something that we already know is important. We know we had to know the children and the families but to go into all of it a little more was helpful and to put a name to it so that we know it has meaning and research behind it. They are terms we now use between us (the staff) in the conversations we were having about how we adjust and change and collect that information about the beginning of the year and use it".

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

All three design principles informed the changes made during the transition with the first principle: 'Belonging' and 'Being' to support strong connections, being the core focus as the teacher felt building connections to families as the most important of the three.



A display of the Walker Learning Approach demonstrating children's interests and learning.

Design principle 1: Belonging and being to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their Funds of Knowledge and Identity: Invest in the 'virtual back packs' children bring through intentional planning.

Information was collected from each family about their child in the form of questions that parents gave written answers. Parents were asked to give descriptions for their children to statements such as "Things I am interested in?" and "My strengths and abilities are?" In this way the teacher collected information about children's and family's FoK and FoI yet some families were unsure how this information was used. Development of the environment was more deliberate in the way in which the FoK and FoI information was used so that children could see that they "belonged" through establishing play areas and experiences that connected to children's FoK. The school staff changed the timing of collecting this information which had previously been returned during the first few weeks of school. Staff prioritised gathering the information the year before where possible so the teacher could use it as a basis for planning and connecting children to the Kindergarten when they transitioned. The teacher said, "we didn't get that information early enough... now we integrate it into what we do." The teacher said working this way, "the children are more comfortable but excited for what they are coming in to."

Thinking the transition through and being more attuned to children and their existing FoK and previous experiences, brought about some changes to routines and expectations of learning experiences. On arrival, the children could choose activities to engage with until the teacher sang a song on the mat to signal the start of the day. This signaled that everyone should pack up and congregate on the mat

for morning greetings. The teacher described doing this to be flexible with entry and any issues such as anxiety over separation that may arise could be dealt with and not keep the class waiting. It also allowed the teacher time to greet and talk to families and when she thought children were ready, start the mat session. Knowing children's FoK and FoI also allowed the teacher to start the day in some family's home languages and use the language in greeting songs.

Respect the child's right to 'be' a child: Affirm each child's identity and sense of safety.

Flexibility in the timetable and teaching times was described by the teacher as being an important part of successful transitions to give children a sense of safety. Children were able to have a staggered start to the year, with half the class on one day, the other half on another and the whole class on the third day. The parents particularly mentioned this as a reason for a smoother start. One said, "The staggered start for kids worked really well." One change that had been made from one year to the next, was the formality of literacy and numeracy teaching as children were now eased more gradually into these formal tasks. A comment had been made in the project about this and the teacher said she asked herself, "what I was expecting and are they ready?" and made a change to her practice. The teacher said that for transition she "pulled back and ... was a bit more flexible." She spoke about thinking of a child with some unhelpful behaviours and described she "thought a little more about of what it (the transition) looked like for him on the first day". Her focus for transition had changed in some ways because of the project and now she tried to simplify the environment and balance between "orientation with settling in and academics". A parent also suggested that the focus on the first weeks "should have less formal activities to begin with and just focus on relationship building".



Knowing many families had spent the summer holiday at the beach and fishing, an ice-cream stand and boat/beach play area was set up.

In the first weeks, there were reminders and repetition of routines from staff in warm and friendly ways. The teacher was heard talking to a child at outdoor time, softly and at his level, saying “if you feel grumpy use your words and talk to me, we don’t touch others, you need to feel safe.” One particular change the teacher commented on was the use of specialist teachers and the children moving to new environments. Thinking about child safety the teacher had decided not to use the specialist teachers in the first week, rather bring the specialist teachers to the class. In this way she felt the children would feel safer with a consistent and known environment. One parent, when asked what in her opinion impedes transitions for children, said “too much scheduling, clutter or moving too fast with too many new things”. The staff kept close proximity to those children who appeared anxious or a little agitated.

The teacher and education assistant were seen to have constant conversations about children and how they were transitioning. Staff noticed one child resting after lunch, looking tired and struggling to attend. A pillow and rug were provided so he could watch on and rest. He was not chastised for being unable to concentrate. Another child, who experienced difficulty going barefoot at outdoor time was allowed to keep his shoes on after a conversation between staff. Another example of staff being attuned to the children was fruit time in the transition week. It was staggered and was completed on a hungriest come first scenario. It was a routine that appeared pleasant, as children were not waiting, and came to fruit time when they wanted. The teacher also used Bibliotherapy as a strategy to assist children in their transitions to school, reading aloud stories to explore feelings and emotions. The morning story was about being nervous on the first day and a discussion about nervousness, and butterflies in the stomach ensued. In the afternoon, a story was shared about making new friends.

Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connection between children, families, educators, school and community.

Building connections to families was an important focus as the school underwent a transformation with the design thinking process around transitions. The teacher saw this design principle as the most important of the three and described it as the “most powerful”. One of the first strategies was to collect information about transitions from families. Before the research project this had not been asked. The staff found that parents wanted more social contact before the school year began. This transformed the November parent information evening into a social event where the Kindergarten hosted a “wine and cheese” evening. The teacher said the event was well attended and instead of frontloading parents with information as in previous years, opportunities were given for families to talk together. Added to this, the school introduced a Teddy Bear’s Picnic the afternoon before school began. This was attended by Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten children

and their families, which the teacher said let children see the setting with their families. One parent commented that the “Teddy Bears Picnic was powerful and positive”. The children were invited to bring their teddies with them on the first day and there were photos of the families, children and teddies taken at the event around the Kindergarten. The photos acted as visual prompts for the staff to talk with children about family members and the fun everyone had at the event.

Connections were built with children, families and staff because of other programs the school had developed. The school had a pre-Kindergarten group and a parent led playgroup. Most children had attended the pre-Kindergarten group and as one mother said, “never underestimate the power of familiarity” and she went on to say, “going from playgroup, to 3-year-old kindy and then 4-year-old kindy all in the same area really helped”. The pre-Kindergarten teacher and the Kindergarten teacher worked closely together, and the children used the same outdoor playground. The school also ran a parent-initiated play group in a separate space. Therefore, the staff knew many of the families and conversations of shared experiences were heard to take place. The greetings at the door by staff and welcoming atmosphere was commented on by parents, as one parent said, “I know we are welcomed and comfortable”. Another parent told of the anxious time she had at transition as her son had not wanted to go and cried at drop off. However, she spoke about the “reassuring chats”, “time and patience” and commented that she was “really happy, I know not all schools have such a good transition”.



Open plan entrance with play options and books at children’s eye level invites them to explore.

Design principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families and professional colleagues.

Communicating with children and families was an important part of transforming transitions. An information pack was sent to all families at the end of the year before starting Kindergarten. It included the Kindergarten philosophy, described the learning program, important dates, what to bring and tips on how to prepare your child for Kindergarten. One parent said, “Yes, I received lots of information about all the upcoming events re: orientation, housekeeping sheets, and other information. Parent night was cancelled (due to COVID-19) so more written information was sent out to compensate.” In the previous transition procedures, families were given a link to a communication software system used in the school. The early years leader and the teacher said this was not utilised by families and so they had amended the parent survey to be sent in the first few weeks of school instead of the year before. Several other communication sources were used including school newsletters, a Facebook site for families, and regular individual conversations at the point of entry and exit for the day with children and families. One parent commented that the transition is a “Well thought out process, that why it’s so good. Well communicated, I always know what’s going on – very successful.”

The staff considered it important to acknowledge and talk with children about their feelings in the transition. The educational assistant was heard talking to an anxious child about the big emotions he was feeling and then said, “give Mum a big hug and she will be back soon.” One parent remarked that she agreed with staff that it was important to acknowledge children’s feelings and emotions in the transition process and not to do so would be damaging to the child. She spoke of other transitions in other places where she had heard adults say things like “...you are a big boy now” or have children compared to others in their ability to cope with the transition process. She was pleased that this was not her experience at this school.

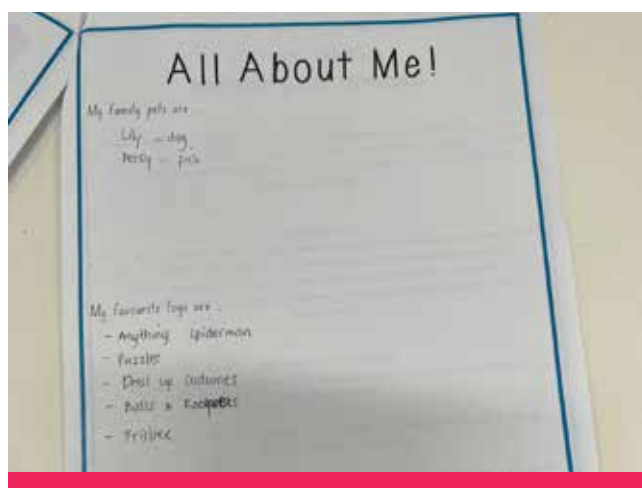


Designated construction area equipped with practical, familiar inclusions.

Collaboratively design a shared blueprint of the ‘transition game plan’ that is culturally responsive to children, families and respects the values of the school’s ethos.

The design thinking process prompted staff to collect opinions from all stakeholders. It was evident that the staff listened and actioned the ideas of families with the previous example given where parents/carers suggested changes about more social contact as described above. The “meet and greet” was a time before school starts in week 1 where each family and child was invited to meet the teacher and assistant. The teacher described the example where she listened to the advice of a mother who said, “she never wanted her child restrained or held while Mum leaves. She never wants this to happen, so having left the child at the door... we had to go about this in a different way and that may mean taking more time. But having these conversations with parents, this is why our ‘meet and greet’ sessions are so important. I knew this was the case before the issue arose.” Another parent who thought their child would have anxiety and separation issues discussed this with staff and stayed outside the door until the child had settled.

The school also utilised a social networking site for each class and each class also had a parent representative. One parent said, the “parent rep is good” while another commented that the “transition was managed very well, having a parent rep to liaise with parents and the teacher is great.” The tips for managing transitions in the information pack were suggested by parents as supportive of a positive transition. The children knew the name of the teacher and several strategies were suggested such as “read books about starting Kindergarten” and “talk enthusiastically with your child about starting Kindergarten.” One parent said when asked what factors help with successful transitions she replied, “lots of talking about kindy prior to entry. Parents being very positive, talking during the holidays, friends talking to (child’s name) positively about kindy and mentioning the teachers name in conversation.”



Teachers collect information about the children’s interests – ‘All about me’.

Design principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

The teacher spoke about the early years leader who in her eyes was one of the catalysts for transforming transitions. She believed it was important to work with someone who had administrative power, had recent classroom experience and understood the demands of early years transitions. The teacher said of the early years' leader, "she gets it, she gets what it is like in the classroom." Furthermore, an advocate was required who understood the importance of transitions and could talk knowledgeably to the Principal to ask for extra resourcing. The teacher said, you need "a huge advocate and going to our Principal and saying we need this for this." Alongside this, the Principal prioritised the importance of transitions and the process of design thinking that this project used. Both the teacher and early years leader described the Principal as having worked on another design thinking project and understood the process, especially when things seemed uncertain in the early stages. The teacher described the Principal, "...she's been really receptive...". Understanding the importance of transitions, the early years leader asked the Principal for extra funding for the Pre-Kindergarten teacher to support the playgroup. It was thought this would have a positive influence on future transitions into Pre-Kindergarten and then Kindergarten. The playgroup would operate in the same space as the Pre-Kindergarten, so children and families became familiar with that environment. Playgroup was becoming the first connection point into the school community and was now seen as the first step into school. This action had been supported but had yet to start due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

It was apparent that the specialist knowledge of teaching and learning in the early years was shared between the pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teacher and their assistants. They shared information about children and had constant conversations about their transition processes from one setting to the other. The Pre-Kindergarten teacher used some of the same routines as Kindergarten and towards the end of the year the children ate their lunch in different spaces in readiness for Kindergarten. This specialist knowledge of early years learning and teaching, and of the children and their families was amplified with the acknowledgement of the school leaders that transitions were critical to school engagement. Allocating time for the early years leader to work within the project and having the ear of the school principal to initiate resource changes assisted in making the project successful. The success of the project prompted attention to the transition from Kindergarten to Pre-primary

and across the early years of school where the design principles were discussed and stimulated ways of thinking of transitions in these years.

Supporting staff and placing an emphasis on the importance of transitions the staff team in this project used the design principles in a grid to demonstrate how they would continue the work they had started. The grid format set out their goals, the strategies, resources and personnel, as well as time frames required to transform transitions. The team described this as a useful tool for which to plan and implement their actions.

Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

One of the changes to transition practices was the introduction of more social occasions for parents to meet and talk together before their children started the school year. Listening and then actioning this took some flexibility in allocating resources by the school leaders such as the budget for a wine and cheese night and for holding a Teddy's Bear picnic the afternoon before school started. This took some negotiation and flexibility in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another response by the leaders to the evolving priorities of stakeholders was to employ an extra educational assistant in the first days of school. This gave the teacher and assistant more time to get to know and engage with children. The teacher was also flexible in easing the demands of the timetable in the first few weeks. Children were allowed much choice and agency to make decision of what to engage with as possible at the start of the day and were reminded about routines in ways that were friendly, courteous and encouraging.

Teacher's voice – what did they see differently?

"Yes – I think I see transitions differently. I think about them more than I did a year ago and I put importance on them. I think I always thought they were important but to think about them a bit more and what we do, really impacts on things, I took for granted. We just do it. I have had a bit more of a thought process about it all and really thought how this is helping my students, how is it helping my families and how can we do better?"

Conclusion

This project brought about a way in which to think about transitions through design-based thinking which allowed the staff to collect different perspectives about the Transition processes. The staff worked to think about how the transition could be improved for both children and their families. This brought about the identification and implementation of new strategies such as innovative events and different ways of communicating at the events. It also assisted to strengthen the ways information gained from families was used in the program and to take children's perspectives into account in the first few weeks of school to ease them into the timetable. Placing a lens on children's transition and the processes around this assisted in making a good transition process even better.

Perth Montessori

School context

Perth Montessori is an independent school located in Burswood, in the Perth Metro area. The school provides individualised teaching and values individual thinking. The website states “We celebrate diversity through building strong communities with our rich clientele of more than 35 nationalities.” Perth Montessori offers a progressive program of education for up to 250 students from birth to 18 years of age. Every child has an Individual Learning Program from the Pre3Montes Playgroup through to high school.

Transition Point

Cycle 1 (Kindergarten)

Pre3Montes is a well-established pre-kindergarten program attached to the school which is attended by children and their families. It offers flexible attendance on Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays for 2-hour sessions. Children attending Pre3Montes transition into one of two Cycle 1 classes, each with both a class teacher (‘director’ in Montessori settings) and an education assistant that stay with the children across the three-year period. Rather than whole group transition events at the beginning of the school year, children transition from the Pre3Montes to Cycle 1 when the child, family and school staff consider the child ready for transition. These transitions take place throughout the year and extend across a full term of ten weeks. As such, the learning environment remains constant and predictable for the children throughout the year. Cycle 1 (3-6 years) is divided into two ‘Children’s Houses’ which reflect the principles of Montessori education, providing individual attention, and opportunities for spontaneous learning and discovery with a focus on responsibility and social awareness.



Timber, soft furnishings, and household elements used to create a familiar homely environment.

Our story

Pre3Montes is considered the entry point for families choosing Perth Montessori. In this context, families become familiar with the Montessori learning philosophy over an extended period prior to transition into Cycle 1. A diversity of family cultures is welcomed into the space and home school partnerships are established. Typically, children and families are well known to staff prior to joining Cycle 1, though some children transition into Cycle 1 without prior experience of the Montessori approach. In 2021, the Transforming Transitions project was embraced as an opportunity to highlight the benefits and efficacy of existing systems in place for transition that reflected the Montessori philosophy. Alongside this goal, reduced enrolments from Pre3Montes to Cycle 1 from the onset of COVID-19 prompted re-examination of the Cycle 1 transition point. The staff maintained Pre3Montes offers the best entry point for introducing children and their families to the school’s unique culture but also recognised changing pressures from parents who were less available to attend Pre3Montes due to work commitments. The staff pondered ways for bringing parents into alignment with Montessori values during the enrolment process, especially if families had not been inducted through Pre3Montes. They also recognised the need for team building around transitions in their school to consolidate a shared understanding of school policies for enrolment that accommodated the demands of all stakeholders.

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

Few changes were made to the existing classroom-based transition practices from 2021, which were believed to be responsive to children, enabling them to ‘be’, and cultivating rich relationships. The class teacher commented that FoI (Funds of Identity) and FoK (Funds of Knowledge) were not terms she had used previously but linked these to the existing Montessori philosophy which drew from the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009). Rather, transformation at the Perth Montessori School evolved through recognition and empowerment of transition practices as a powerful process for establishing a shared understanding of the Montessori approach among the broader school community. The Pre3Montes teacher identified shared vision as the most significant transformation from 2021 to 2022. The teacher stated that working toward a shared vision for transitions at a whole school level reaffirmed “why we’re doing things the way we do” but also highlighted that flexibility was key.

Design principle 1: Being and belonging to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of knowledge and identity: invest in the ‘virtual backpacks’ children bring through intentional planning.

The personalised interactions afforded by the Montessori approach was recognised by the staff as a fundamental practice used for exploring the children’s FoI and FoK. In the role of ‘director’, the teacher works to follow the children’s interests and support these within the context of the established Montessori ‘jobs’. During observations, the teachers and education assistants were frequently engaged in conversations with children about the children’s lives and the children were encouraged to share events and ideas with their peers in whole group sharing sessions on the mat, where the children were encouraged to share events and artifacts from their life. These exchanges were complemented by relaxed conversations with parents at the pick-up/drop-off point outside the classroom. Here, parents and teachers could be heard discussing weekend events which revealed the teachers had knowledge not only of the children’s immediate family, but also of their extended family and interests. For example, the teacher asked one child if he had been fishing with his uncle on the weekend, in a manner than suggested familiarity. This knowledge was used to help direct the children to Montessori ‘jobs’ which aligned with their interests, such as a leaf puzzle for children whose stories reflected an interest in nature. Physical furnishing such as wooden tables, a central sink and food preparation area, curtains, and cushions, added to personal conversation to create a homely tone. The teachers spoke of accommodations to support diversity of physical, cultural, and socio-emotional needs to cultivate a sense of belonging and security. However, it was felt this aspect of the transition process could be strengthened even further through more in-depth interviews with parents and carers to learn more about the child and their background. Holding meetings or interviews with parents before commencing school was raised as something that had been put on hold due to COVID restrictions but would be an important part of the enrolment process from 2021.

Teacher’s voice

“FOI/FOK aligns with the original being, becoming and belonging because I’m thinking about what are they coming with and where are they becoming from.”



The room uses timber, soft furnishings, and household elements to create a familiar homely environment.

Respect the child’s right to ‘be’ a child: Affirm each child’s identity and sense of safety.

The classroom context reflected mindfulness of how best to support a child’s wellbeing. For example, the teacher intentionally minimised visual stimulus on walls to avoid sensory overload. Children were also given full agency to choose their own ‘jobs’, snack when ready and toilet on demand for the full three hours of the morning session. Rather than being taught routines and rituals in a large group, transitioning children were immersed in the experience and learned this through a variety of ways, such as through observation of older children continuing from previous years, peer modelling and subtle redirection to support adoption of new processes and assimilation into the consistent classroom routines. The personal nature of interactions with children and their families in the Montessori setting allowed for bespoke transition processes. For example, the teacher and parent were observed in collaboration making changes for one child who had not attended Pre3Montes to stay for mornings only for the first two weeks. The teacher explained this was because, “he wasn’t settling well.” In the Montessori context, this was a simple adjustment, as very small numbers of children transitioning into Cycle 1 at any given time. In both 2021 and 2022, only two children transitioned into Cycle 1 at the commencement of the year because children transition throughout the year when they are ready.

Cultivate respective, responsive relationships to build connections between children, families, educators, school, and community.

The transitions project helped to highlight the importance of communication and opened discussion about how the existing processes for connecting key stakeholders could be enhanced. There had been a decline in the number of children transitioning from Pre3Montes into Cycle 1 which was, in part, attributed to COVID-19. The Pre3Montes teacher reasoned that numbers had been impacted, “because parents don’t want to bring their babies.” This prompted consideration of how the program could become better connected to the school. One change was that families from Pre3Montes were invited to more whole school events such as music concerts and school discos. Through these more relaxed events, prospective families were enabled to build a sense of belonging to the school community, building relationships with other families, and normalising the connection between Pre3Montes and the broader Montessori school context and values.

Teacher’s voice

“We get a lot more information about children who come from Pre3Montes because we already have a relationship with those families and children – these transitions are always smoother.”

Design principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families, and professional colleagues.

The relationship between the Pre3Montes and Cycle 1 teachers was well established over several years. Likewise, the processes of building relationships face to face with parents and families through the Pre3Montes had become integral to paving a relaxed, informed pathway into Cycle 1. The Pre3Montes teacher saw her role of explaining the Montessori philosophy to parents as an importance component of both the transitions process and retention of children in the school.

There was a temporary change at the commencement of 2022 as the Pre3Montes teacher was absent for part of term 1. The Cycle 1 teacher noted that this had disrupted communication of expectations for transition between staff, parents and families resulting in the erosion of some relationships. The Cycle 1 teacher took this as evidence that the former transition processes were “working really well” adding that a different approach had been adopted by the interim teacher which was not as positive for the child affected. Despite this affirmation, the Pre3Montes teacher recognised she had “made mistakes” in the past and was continuing to work on more collaborative processes for transition visits to Cycle 1 so that inevitable changes to the plan in response to working with three-year-olds might be better understood. For example, the staff had noticed there was increasing numbers of children entering Cycle 1 that had not attended Pre3Montes prior. This prompted discussion about how transition might be experienced differently by these children and how a transition into a Montessori program may be navigated smoothly if entering at Cycle 1 or later Cycles. The Montessori philosophy champions children’s independence and as such, parents are not encouraged to enter the Cycle 1 classroom to settle their child.

Rather, parents are guided to stay at the gate at drop off time from commencement. However, for parents of children who are new the Montessori commencing Cycle 1, teachers worked to build close connections and involve both parents and children in decision-making. This allowed for a customised transition to be negotiated if the child was unsettled and ensured everyone was clear about the transition plan. This approach was built upon a mutual understanding that accommodations would be made within the parameters of the Montessori philosophy.

The transitions project prompted more open communication between the teaching staff and the leadership team so that existing processes could be re-examined from a whole school perspective. What was being communicated to parents about the Montessori method during the transition process was found to link to many decisions related to school identity and perception among the broader community. The need for consistent messaging was discovered to be crucial to how the school’s unique identity was to be understood and communicated to prospective families at initial contact with the school and in later points of induction into the school. This was highlighted during visits to neighbouring feeder schools and early learning centres where it was discovered that community perceptions of the school had changed when the word “Montessori” had been removed from the school’s name in 2017. In response, the school restored ‘Montessori’ to the school’s name in 2021. This change was a uniting event which fostered high levels of engagement from the children, families, and community for the development of a school name, logo, clothing, and signage and supported greater acceptance of the Montessori approach from prospective parents who had clearer expectations of the school’s ethos.

Teacher’s voice

“If parents are coming to school unsure, that can really have an impact on the child and their transition to school. Parents lose a bit of trust.”



Development of Montessori playgrounds are one of the projects undertaken inclusively with the school community.

Design principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

During 2021, the school underwent a change of leadership. However, the staff noted the transitions project offered an opportunity to reflect upon existing enrolment processes for transitioning families into the school, as well as child transitions, and committed to sending key staff members to the professional development. As the children's transition processes were long established and had proven to provide somewhat seamless entry from Pre3Montes into formal school, discussions in staff meetings focussed on enhancing transitions practices to both attracting and keeping new families in the school. The staff believed Montessori offered a niche alternative education requiring specialised information for families who wished to know more about the school's approach. Significantly, discussion of transitions at both levels in a whole school context raised the profile and importance of transitions practices and empowered the early years teachers to have a voice as critical in the enrolment process and for instilling the school's ethos.

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

The adjustments to school leadership early in the project presented a space of change that was enabling for transitions to be reimaged in the school. The year unfolded with a fresh sense of collaboration that allowed the philosophy behind transition decisions in Cycle 1 to be discussed and refined, and for solutions to be found that would meet the contemporary practical needs of teachers, parents, and children with consideration of Montessori values. Distributed leadership was highlighted as vital for enabling staff in early childhood to make decisions that were responsive to individual children and their families and actioned in a timely manner. The Pre3Montes teacher reflected on the importance of supportive leadership to the success of the transition process. She said, "Unless we get support from leadership, and are listened to, within reason, we can't really do what we need to do."

The teachers reflected upon practices and ideas they had experimented with for previous transitions, such as beginning transition visits from two and a half years old into Cycle 1. Through this, they gained clarity about the most appropriate timing for the children and where they could find common ground with parents to navigate the most appropriate transitions for individual children. Ultimately, the staff had identified and resolved challenges that had arisen with previous transition processes and felt empowered to action them. The Pre3Montes teacher said, "Leadership has been really, really, important. Now I have a voice I can make things happen for the children." They felt confident that their new processes for long transition were now stable and daily practices would remain flexible and responsive.

Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

The Pre3Montes teacher was recognised as the expert over the practices associated with the Cycle 1 transition prior to the transitions project, conducting visits to a Cycle 1 class with an individual child when the child was ready. This was sometimes quite spontaneous, and while rudimentary plans were made with the Cycle 1 teachers, the visits did not always come to fruition as the child has to be ready and willing to participate. The Pre3Montes teacher explained that the project had prompted a change in the timing of these visits that would be more routine for the Cycle 1 children. She and the Cycle 1 teacher had reviewed the process from multiple perspectives, including that of the Cycle 1 children, which had previously been overlooked. In response, the transition visits underwent a process of trial and error and were eventually changed so that all transition visits took place at 11.30am, after Pre3Montes, and had the added benefit of enabling the transitioning children to spend longer in the Cycle 1 classroom if they wished. Also, the child transitioning was limited to visiting only the classroom they would transition into rather than both classes. The pre3Monte's teacher noticed, "they visit over the term – from very young – getting to know the teachers and other children. Soon, they are staying for longer periods, greeted by the other children, they know where the toilet is and the routine, and they don't want to leave!" The program adjustment required forward planning and discussion between staff to decide who would be a good fit for the child early in the transition and in some cases, in discussion with the parents. These seemingly minor changes effectively enhanced collaboration between the staff and families and supported a smoother transition for the children who had begun to build a relationship with the Cycle 1 teacher and become familiar with their room earlier.

Teacher's voice

"This is going to be an awesome year – we've done all the try this – try that and refined it. We're ready to go."

Conclusion

The transitions project was timely for the Perth Montessori School who were ready to address some structural changes to long standing transition processes. The transitions project allowed key stakeholders in the process to step back from the day to day of their practice and examine the bigger picture of their school's strategic plan and the place of transitions within it. The design-based thinking process allowed transitions to be deconstructed into the considerations of stakeholders beyond the school to reconsider the issue of enrolments from the perspectives of families and community perception. Multiple innovations to address this were tabled and actioned successfully with the full integration of the perspectives and expertise of the early childhood transitions team as critical points of contact for families.

Australian Islamic College

School context

The Australian Islamic College, established 1986, is an independent Islamic multi-campus College in Western Australia catering to K-12. The school describes their student cohort as a unique mix from a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds which allows students to better understand Australia's multicultural society. It is their aim to provide a strong academic base coupled with a moral education that caters for varying needs of the student population. Experienced teachers assist students to achieve their educational goals, build effective learners and inspire students to aim for excellence in their academic and personal life.

Transition Point

Kindergarten

The Kindergarten classrooms mirror those of all classrooms across the school and are located on the Primary school campus. All Kindergarten children start on the first day of term 1. From 2022, the first four weeks of school changed from full time school to 5 shortened days per fortnight, with children collected at 1p.m. Kindergarten children have a slightly earlier finish than older students for the remainder of the year, leaving at 3.15pm. Parents are informed of transition processes prior to arrival via a parent information morning at the end of the school year, and a 'get to know you day' where children are also invited to attend, meet the teacher and become familiar with the school environment. The room is prepared in a manner representative of a normal school day. It projects a sense of formality and structure, but with accommodations for the transition including sparse furnishings to provide more floor space for play and access to carefully selected resources. The indoor program integrates a whole class mat time with the class teacher and child-directed play-based opportunities including table-top activities, construction, and home corner. A lesson is conducted by the religion teacher to teach Muslim greetings, beliefs, and prayers reflective of the school's ethos. The location of the classroom is separate from the toilets, and the playground is situated across a roadway/carpark. Firm programming parameters are required to facilitate adult supervision for toileting, supervised meals, and associated prayers and for the 40-minute outdoor play period.

Our story

The Kindergarten transition at Perth Islamic Collage has been a consistent process over several years. The routine of a parent information night and Kindergarten pack to prepare families for their transition into the school were accepted practices. 'First day of school' experiences were also routine and included structured mat sessions introducing the children to Islamic cultural practices and school rituals, a one-hour introductory lesson with the religion teacher, play opportunities and the teaching of rules for safety to accommodate the classroom's location in relation to the toilet area and adjacent roadway. The Transforming Transitions project opened conversations in the school to view transitions from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. It also provided opportunity to re-examine aspects of the Pre-school to Kindergarten transition that had been identified by the teacher as an area for improvement. These included children and parents struggling to separate on the first days of school, upset or unsettled behaviours among the children, first day 'discoveries' of children requiring additional support, and exhausted children by 1pm with no space to rest. Sustaining a positive, secure learning environment during the religion lesson with a different teacher was also raised prompting discussion about early childhood pedagogy through the lens of the transitioning child.

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

Reflecting upon the project's three Design Principles for transitions, the transition teacher drew primarily upon the first principle: 'Being and belonging to support strong connections' where she saw the greatest opportunity to initiate change. The changes made reflected a shift to positioning children at the centre of the transition process and considered the quality of the child and families' experiences of transition. This shift in perspective became central to decision-making and was significant to longer terms benefits to children's wellbeing and learning.

Design principle 1: Being and belonging to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of knowledge and identity: invest in the ‘virtual backpacks’ children bring through intentional planning.

Building partnerships with parents and families was found to be significant in the data collected in the 2021 transition. Processes were developed for gathering essential information about children’s growth and development which assisted building rapport prior to commencing school. A multi-faceted approach was taken to extend upon the information gathered by administration (e.g., medical records and family backgrounds) to include information about children’s FoK (Funds of Knowledge) and FoI (Funds of Identity) from the transition project’s professional development days. The teacher saw the opportunity to harness existing processes such as the parent questionnaire (part of the Kindergarten information pack), parent information session, and the ‘get to know you’ day to find out more. She consciously worked to build trusting relationships with families through relaxed conversation when possible. Through this, meaningful information was discovered about the children’s home contexts and circumstances, including home languages spoken by the children, parental concerns about their child’s development and information about children’s lives and interests. Reflecting upon the children and families’ FoK and FoI was found to be invaluable process for creating a transition experience that would feel more relevant to children and their parents.

Teacher’s voice

“Knowing more about each child relieves our anxiety because we can now prepare with confidence.”

Parents were keen to share information about their children. In their comments, they emphasised the need for teachers to know about their child’s capabilities, whether they had been separated from their parents prior to school (e.g., to attend childcare) and expected impact of having siblings on their child’s transition. For example, one parent reasoned, “Having other siblings helped because my child was a little bit familiar even though they hadn’t been to childcare, but they were a little bit anxious, and I hadn’t predicted that as they’re usually so confident – maybe they thought I was going to stay.” The teacher observed there was an important by-product of bridging home and school through partnership. She noticed that when the parents felt comfortable and connected to her, they became her allies for pursuing the children’s best interests.

Teacher’s voice

“The children see the trusting relationship between the teacher and the parents... it makes it easier for the children to trust us too – it’s a partnership”

Learning about the children enabled the teacher to make informed and insightful changes to the school experience for the children in 2022. Home languages were actively incorporated into the program from commencement and were visible in the learning environment as they were identified as central to the child’s FoK and FoI. Family photos were also collected and placed in the learning environment as a reference point to children ‘missing mum’ and to project that the children now had a school family too – made up of people who care about each other. One substantial change in 2022 was the allocation of an additional Education Assistant to the Kindergarten class for the first two weeks of school. The goal was to accommodate children who were identified as potentially needing additional support. This was very successful and allowed unsettled or anxious children to be supported without imposing on the experience of the remaining children.

Respect the child’s right to ‘be’ a child: Affirm each child’s identity and sense of safety.

A parent ‘Welcome pack’ was sent home with families at the information morning as part of the teacher’s approach to supporting children to feel confident and comfortable on their initial days at school. The pack included information to share with their children in preparation for coming to school and suggested transition strategies for children to engage in at home. Parents were appreciative of the information pack and agreed that home-based transition practices were critical to their child’s successful transition. One parent described the usefulness of the teacher’s suggestions for her child, “In the package there are suggestions you can do with your kid at home like ‘use the lunch box for Kindy for a week or two before starting Kindy’ and that helped me work on my child’s independence. That helped them because then they didn’t have to depend on anyone else or have to ask for help if they’re not comfortable.” They also described several strategies of their own. For example, families talked through the first day, set out clothes with their child, drove past the school, explained drop off and pick up processes, and made sure their child got an early night. One parent regarded what families did with their children at home to be the most powerful impact on how the transition to school might play out for a child.



Class Welcome on IWB inclusive of the languages spoken by children in the class.

The teacher was also mindful of how the emotional and physical safety of the children could be better supported in the 2022 transition. Insights from parents and school staff in the 2021 data showed the practice of shortened days, trialled in 2021, had a positive impact. Parents reported it was necessary to enable the children to attend all sessions rather than needing to keep them home when exhausted and miss some of the program. In response, the practice was upheld in 2022 and continued to be a defining adjustment for supporting the children to maintain stamina and regulate behaviour. Within the context of the daily program, the teacher adjusted the pace of the day to be more flexible and responsive and ‘go with the flow’ rather than insisting on formal learning prematurely. For example, she explained, “I would not insist on the children sitting for the full story – if the children were losing interest I would move on and go with the flow.” She also redesigned the classroom to allow more space for the children to play in less structured ways on the floor. These changes were instrumental in 2022, and the teacher believed that together, these practices promoted harmony between children, families, and educators.

Teacher’s voice

“We need to collaborate with parents to be attuned to the child’s fears, happiness and wellbeing.”

Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connections between children, families, educators, school, and community.

During the initial days of 2022 transition, the teacher adjusted her expectations of the parent’s role, moving away from ‘drop and leave’ of 2021 to an inclusive, flexible approach which invited parents to become participants in the children’s transition. This began at the information morning, where the teacher made personal connections with families and modelled positive expectations of school. In response, parents shared in interviews how they had used this strategy to prepare their child for school beforehand and to consider their role in preparing for a smooth separation. To enhance the children’s sense of safety, parents were invited to stay for the morning session in 2022. A parent explained, “You get to

be involved in what they are learning in a session for about two and half hours. She [teacher] called the roll, they did some learning, they did a painting, and it was like ‘oh, so this is what Kindy’s all about.’ I liked getting the timetable so I could think ‘oh, that’s what they’re doing now’ – I feel like I’m part of the journey with them.” Alternatively, parents could stay and mingle with other parents in the adjoining foyer if they preferred. The teacher observed, “the children knew their parents were staying in the communal area and could see that mum or dad was there to ‘check’”. The teacher also stated her intent to “encourage the parents to talk to one another before and after school” to assist families to make connections with one another as they transitioned as parents into the school.

Parents of children who were reluctant to separate were encouraged to stay longer to support their child, opening fresh opportunities for relaxed dialog with the teacher about the specific transitions of children with higher needs. The teacher stated, “Some parents are specifically invited to stay where we identified some children needed that extra support and that has really worked well. On two occasions, a parent was asked to stay all day. For those children whose parents stayed, the teacher said they “witnessed them [the children] settle and become confident. One parent had tears in her eyes she was so grateful that her child actually wanted to come to school in the second week.” Seeing the early benefits of these adjustments, the teacher also made a point of increasing her availability to parents explaining, “I make a point of being present every morning in the classroom without fail. I’m present for the parents and more diligent about making appointments with parent when they want to chat or be acknowledged.” She reported that these changes had led to longer conversations which gave insight into how the children were responding to the transition process and what adjustments could be made.

Parent’s voice

We “talked about what fun she was going to have a kindy and making friends – not the work part or the fact that I was going to leave her there. I didn’t want to give her anxiety.”



Classroom furniture minimalised to create more floor space for unstructured play experiences.

Design principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families, and professional colleagues.

Communicating information to the children before commencing school was a significant change in the transition process in 2022. Exemplifying this shift to a more child-centred approach was the development of a video that introduced the children to their teachers ahead of their first day. The video was a candid navigation of the school environment designed to familiarise the children with the teacher's face and voice and set expectations for what the child might encounter in the classroom and playground environments. The teacher anticipated what the child may wish to see or know and communicated respect for the child's perspective. In response, the parents reported that the transition was "Really well planned so I felt really comfortable. They even sent out a video and you felt you already knew all these people – so you feel like it's okay to leave your child there." The video also created a positive reference point that children and parents could return to and review repeatedly together for reassurance. The teacher anticipated parents might, "play it (the video) as many times as they wanted to over the break and keep it in their mind and prepare them for how the classroom will look on the first day, so they are not coming into the unknown." The intent was also to affirm the child's right to 'be' a child at school and to share an expectation with children and their families of engaging in meaningful child-oriented experiences at school.

Teacher's voice

"The parents' feelings have a big impact because the children see our emotions – they read our face."

Approaching transition with a flexible and inclusive approach to the first day of school improved parent participation and fostered greater transparency about the school's attitude toward transition. Permitting parents to join their child in the initial session in 2022, opened lines of communication and enabled bespoke transitions to be negotiated for some children. The approach also supported collaboration and cohesion among the parent body who had greater opportunity to share their own experiences of transition and separation with other parents. The teacher witnessed development of positive social stories for individual children and their parents across the initial days of school, some revealing underlying anxieties of children who may need additional support. For example, one parent was anxious about their children's fear of separation, reporting "at night, she wakes up to just check we are still around" and "we're grateful that they actually wanted to come to school in the second week." With stronger, more personal relationships formed with families prior to school, home-based transition experiences in the aftermath of the initial days of school were more openly shared with teachers. The teacher reciprocated readily, sharing her own observations, listening, and accommodating to simultaneously strengthen the partnership and respond to the children's daily circumstances. Class Dojo was also established to maintain regular communication. Children were also asked to draw and talk about their thoughts about the first days.



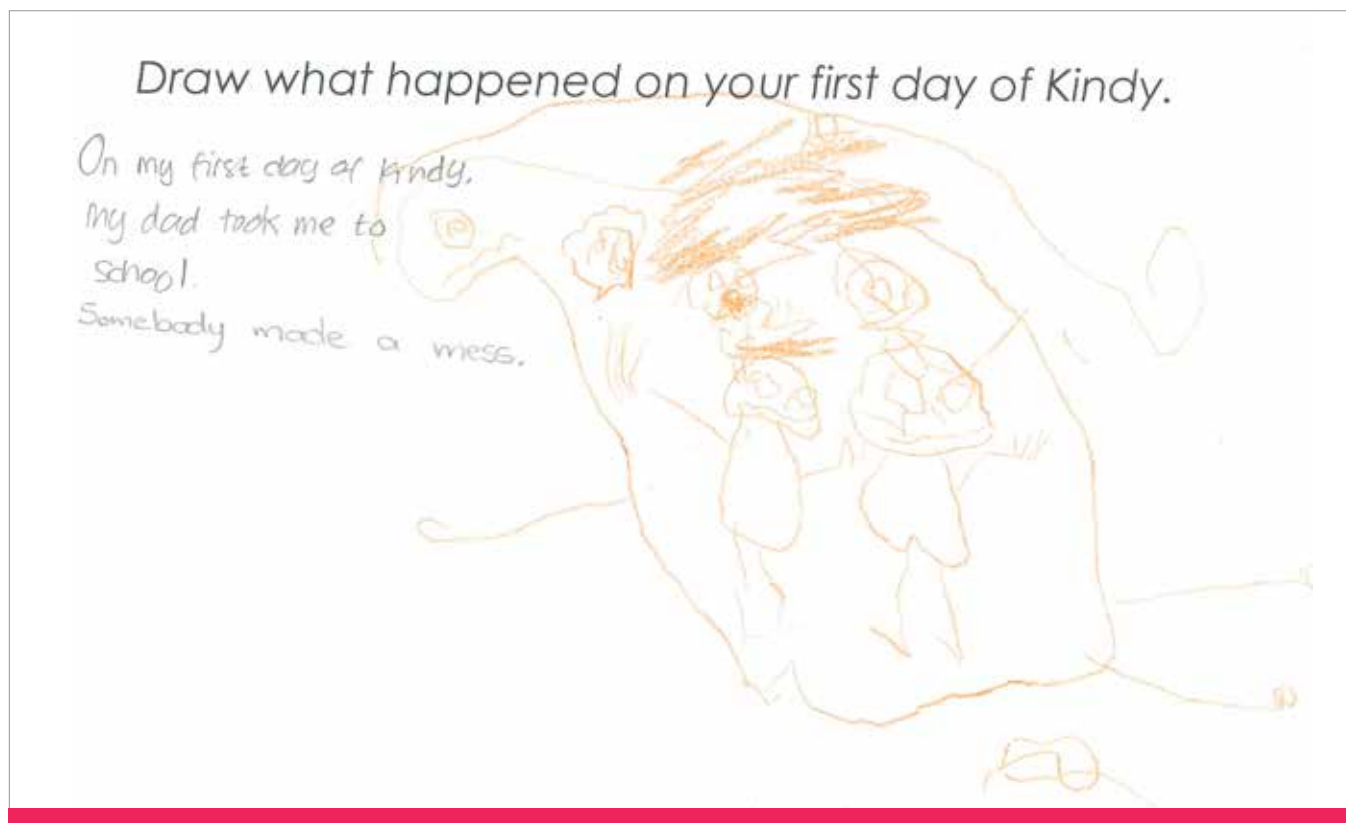
Easy to reach resources promoted child agency.

Collaboratively design a shared blueprint of the 'transition game plan' that is culturally responsive to children, families and respects the values of the school's ethos.

The Kindergarten teacher, who championed transitions in her school, explained that her experience designing a transition game plan had been enhanced by sharing the experience with the neighbouring Kindergarten teacher. Through the transforming transitions project, her colleague became an important sounding board and fellow advocate for effective transitions in the school. She clarified that, "working with another teacher – not alone – has been really helpful." Collaboration involved formally planning the 'get to know you' sessions and the parent information night, and regular informal reflection upon action as the transition plan continued to unfold. The transition plan was not viewed as final, but subject to ongoing adjustments that the teacher explained would now be "mindful of the impact of transition."

An extensive Welcome Pack has been provided for families prior to school commencement for several years. The pack includes an outline of the practical processes of starting school, such as uniform requirements, as well as a 'count-down to school' and daily timetable. The usefulness of the pack was reaffirmed in parent feedback. One parent reported high engagement with the 'count-down' initiative which helped their child prepare by counting "how many more sleeps." Another explained that "knowing the timetable made me feel like I was part of the journey with my child."

The Welcome Pack was provided at an information night for parents. In 2021, this session involved a presentation by the teacher outlining much of what was included in the Welcome Pack. In response to reflection upon the transition principle of 'creating a shared vision,' the teacher acknowledged the school was unique from many other schools. She wanted to design a resource that would "give more than information" and "reassure parents through setting up positive expectations" and felt it would be helpful for new parents to see what lay ahead across the whole year as a long transition. The resource produced was a literal 'vision' of the kindergarten year in video format, stepping through the kindergarten year's milestones and events and celebrating their connection to the school's ethos. This was presented live at the information morning providing a strong reference point for discussion amongst new parents and staff. This, in addition to more personal conversations with parents and children on the 'get to know you' day expressed and upheld the values of the school and lay a clear transition blueprint for families and children. The teacher confirmed these changes had been effective, stating, "we built a better bond with the families this year because we were more collaborative in our approach. Having an orientation day all together (with children, parents, and teachers) has been very positive and the feedback from parents has been much more positive this year."



A child's drawing of what happened on their first day.

Design principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

Administration in the Islamic College oversee Kindergarten to Year 10. Centralised systems are in place for enrolment, use of the school environment and resources, and for overseeing consistent pedagogies that uphold the school's ethos and facilitate the school's aspiration for high academic achievement. In signing up to be part of the project a spotlight was placed on the transition into Kindergarten, acknowledged as the first year of school. Building her own understanding of the importance of transitions, the Kindergarten teacher felt better equipped to bring initiatives for transitions to the school Principal for consideration. The Principal was receptive and entrusted the Kindergarten teacher to use her specialised expertise to enact pedagogical decisions, such as modified delivery of explicit teaching alongside play-based approaches better suited to early childhood, especially in the early part of the Kindergarten year. This was noticed by parents who sensed the teacher held a degree of autonomy to be responsive to the children during the sensitive transition period. Families viewed this as a strength, illustrated when one parent said that "the teaching staff are trusted experts in the administrator's eyes."

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

The Kindergarten teacher was committed to sharing her newfound expertise around child centred transitions with the Principal and executive staff to make the transition process more visible. She was empowered by the school's decision to participate in the project which assisted in her making change within her teaching context. transition of families and children into Kindergarten and the school more broadly became an evolving priority for the teacher who saw a school-wide need to ensure adequate time and opportunity were available to build common ground with all stakeholders from before school commencement. This allowed her to seize the initiative to develop a different timeline for information gathering and giving as well how the timetable and environment could look. She said, "I've changed my thinking a bit – I've always felt restricted by my environment and felt I had to do things a certain way but this year, I've become a bit more daring because I've taken ownership of this classroom and responsibility lies with me."

Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

The school administration assisted the teacher in being flexible and adapting practices in transitions. It was apparent that not all information about children's growth and development was always shared by families. This meant that on entry some children needed more assistance to separate and learn in a group situation. Changing the enrolment information and the information the teacher collected went in some way to ameliorate this however the school decided to assist in providing an extra educational assistant in the first few weeks of school. In this way the teacher was able to adapt and innovate the ways in which she assisted families and children into school.

Another flexible response to the transition process of young children was to adapt the timetable. Religious education is a central component to the school culture and is prioritised in the school community. In Kindergarten, religious education has traditionally been introduced on the first day. In 2021, many children were observed to find this period of the day challenging, being faced with a new adult, and warranted re-evaluation of the teaching practices being used. Administration adapted to this finding by reassigning a teacher and investing in professional development for that teacher to develop a stronger alignment with the practices used by the Kindergarten teacher. Religious education was



Playful teaching practices were adopted by the religion teacher that reflected an early childhood philosophy.

also reduced from 1 hour to a 40 minute more active and playful experience to enhance the children’s engagement. These decisions were critical structural changes which enhanced the quality of the children’s transition experiences.

Conclusions

The transformative power of using design-based thinking to think about transitions was felt keenly by the kindergarten teachers at the Islamic College. The teachers shared that some of the exercises in the Professional Development provided in the project “felt uncomfortable” but acknowledged they could now see why the initial open-endedness of design-based thinking was needed initially to prompt rethinking of practices that had become taken for granted. The greatest benefit lay in the teachers’ realisation of the power and responsibility they held to make a difference, and what was possible from ground level to create a transition experience for every child that would be memorable and positive.

Teacher’s Voice

“The project has made me more confident about what I’m doing. The encouragement and support from AISWA (Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia) and ECU (Edith Cowan University) have made a huge difference. I really value that – I feel empowered now. I would also like to thank Mr Tarin for affording the students at Australian Islamic College Dianella, their families and myself, the opportunity to participate in the project. Moreover, I would like to acknowledge and thank my colleagues, and special thanks to my partner teacher, Miss Raj, who has been a fantastic support and for her contributions and teamwork on the project.”



Inclusive language used in environmental text reflecting the home languages of children.



Children paintings in the first week.



Invitations to play were set out for children to explore on arrival.

South Coast Baptist College

School context

South Coast Baptist College is a co-educational Christian community within a college, catering to students from Childcare to Year 12 with a School ICSEA value of 1048. The school serves Rockingham, Waikiki, Kwinana, Secret Harbour, and surrounding areas with an enrolment of approximately 1 400 students in Childcare, Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary programs. Of these students who attend Child Care, 15% identify with a language background other than English. The Early Learning Centre (ELC) is located on the school grounds and is linked to the school by a pathway and gate. The ELC offers long day care for children 6 months to Kindergarten age and before & after school & vacation care from Kindergarten to age 13. The long day care has 169 enrolments, not including school students. 13 children (7.69%) speak another language other than English as well as English. The school also hosts a community playgroup, for which they provide the venue, the program, and staff support. The early learning centre is described on its website as friendly, welcoming, child-focused, and families are valued as the centre is described as “generational”.

Transition point

Kindergarten

There is a Kindergarten program at the Early Learning Centre [ELC] (Koorlongka) and four Kindergarten classes with 18 students in a class in the Primary School on the school site. Both Kindergarten programs use a Reggio Emilia inspired approach to offer spacious, creative and nurturing environments. The children engage in a specialist gymnastics program. In addition, the Kindergarten at the ELC (Koorlongka) has a Wildspace outdoor experience, and nutritious meals and snacks are prepared daily. The Studio and Wildspace areas are incorporated into each room’s program and provide an invitation for children to explore a wide array of materials and the natural environment. Children are afforded opportunities to express their learning and creativity within a structured environment. The Kindergarten classrooms are in the Early Learning Centre (ELC) next door to the Pre-Kindergarten room.

Children starting in the ELC Kindergarten may:

- have moved up from the Pre-Kindergarten class in the ELC to the Kindergarten room at the ELC, or
- start as a brand new student in the ELC Kindergarten room, or
- move between both the ELC and Primary School Kindergarten rooms with the ELC seen as a wraparound care and education service. The Primary school Kindergarten runs a five-day fortnight with students attending Monday/ Wednesday and alternate Friday or Tuesday/Thursday and alternate Friday. These children would attend on alternate days of the week in the ELC Kindergarten, e.g., One week children may attend Tuesday and Thursday and alternate Fridays in the Primary School Kindergarten and Monday and Wednesday and the opposite alternate Friday days would be spent in the ELC Kindergarten room.

Thinking through transitions with the design principles

All three design principles informed the changes made during the transition with the first principle: ‘Belonging’ and ‘Being’ to support strong connections, a driver to transform the transition. A core focus on improving the continuity between the school and ELC staff and being more responsive to each child’s FoK and FoI were central to decisions made throughout the project.

Teacher’s voice – Funds of Knowledge (FoK) and Funds of Identity (FoI)

“We have used these terms more so with the parents and with the other educators in the room. It is also a common term that we now use between the school and us”



A poster in the arrival area.

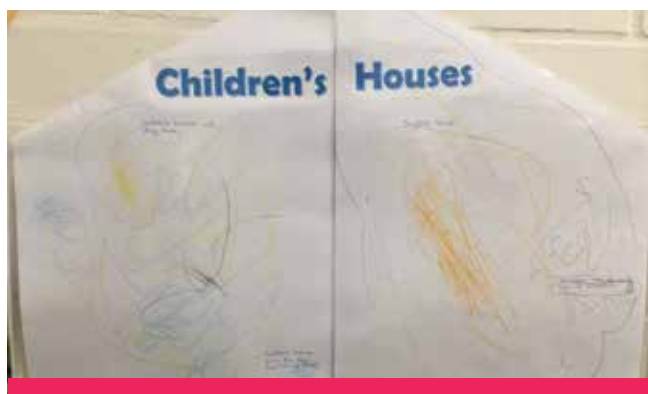
Design Principle 1: 'Belonging' and 'being' to support strong connections

Know each child and be visibly responsive to their funds of identity and knowledge: invest in the 'virtual backpacks' children bring through intentional planning.

Enrolment information collected at the ELC always included details about children's cultural backgrounds, languages, family members, the personality of the child, the child's strengths, abilities and interests, important family events and medical needs. This information was passed up from the three-year-old room. In addition to this, a settling checklist collected information on children's medical needs, eating habits, use of sunscreen, a family photo, custody orders in place, use of glasses, clarity on the signing in process and any developmental concerns and was used by staff to cater for the child's needs.

The focus shifted in 2022 to ensure the knowledge gathered about children's FoI and FoK was included in planning and programming. Family links were made more visible through activities such as children being asked to bring something from home at news time to share in the first week. Photographs were taken of these artifacts, and these were used to make a collage that was put up in the room and linked to the 'Children's Houses' display. This is a display where the children drew a picture of their house and their family. Staff found out more about one child's family background following comment from a grandparent who noticed a flag in the classroom and said they were also from Korea. The teacher also mentioned it is planned to use children's backgrounds as the focus for Harmony Day celebrations. Several bilingual staff who speak Nigerian, Afrikaans, Italian, Fijian and Filipino also support EAL/D children and families.

In 2022 the ELC also chose to slowly transition the children into the ELC Kindergarten in three small groups of six children rather than the whole group. The teacher commented, "It was nice to sort of get to know each child individually and the parents as well in a slow process rather than saying, OK, we'll settle you all now."



The children's house artwork created by children to show their family.

Parent's voice

"I think there's valuable information that teachers could do with because it helps them to be able to understand who the child is and where the child is coming from."

Respect the child's right to 'be' a child: Affirm each child's identity and sense of safety.

During the project, the ELC focused on providing a child centred Kindergarten program that respected the child's right to 'be' a child and affirmed each child's identity and sense of safety. This provided challenges as some children transitioned to the ELC Kindergarten and some children moved to the school Kindergarten. The teacher commented, "Challenges include how many children are moving to pre-primary, how many children are moving to the ELC Kindergarten and how many children are moving to the school Kindergarten. It is tricky to work out transition numbers." Prioritising the Kindergarten Holiday Program just for children attending the ELC Kindergarten helped plan for successful transition based on the children's needs and interests. As part of the last day of the Kindergarten Holiday Program, the children were invited to set up the room ready for their first day of Kindergarten in the ELC. The children collaborated with the teacher to choose their favourite toys, puzzles, and games to create play areas, with the teacher providing cues to support the decisions made. This supported the first week of transition as the teacher commented "the children were more focused in their play, were all engaged and settling of children who were distressed ran more smoothly than the previous year."

The teacher also observed more closely to notice what the children were interested in during the first few days and adjusted the environment accordingly. She commented that "They love their cars, so I've sort of tried to tweak it a little bit and adding maths and literacy and all that sort of stuff into the cars area, making that area bigger and maybe take away more of the literacy, which they're not quite ready for, like the letters." Providing activities and resources that were more child focused with a greater variety of resources to engage children in indoor play led to a calmer, positive atmosphere



The room set up for day one.

during the first week. Additionally, the importance of the children's friendships was highlighted in this context as many of the children had attended the Pre-Kindergarten together. The teacher noticed how during the transition as children moved rooms they found it difficult being away from their friends. She commented, "I've really learned how much the kids really rely on their friends and their friendships that they make."

Changes to the timetable in 2022 also reflected an increased sensitivity to children's identity and needs. Shorter mat sessions were implemented throughout the day with a focus on establishing routines and familiarising children with the environment. One parent commented on the factors that impeded children's transitions "Forgetting that they are little, and they are moving into a different learning space. Fundamentally we are talking about four-year-olds and sometimes you'll be like, oh well, you should know this and you should behave like this." The parent went on to say, "I think there's valuable information that teachers could do with because it helps them to be able to understand who the child is and where the child is coming from because a lot of times you might just think a child is acting up, but you don't know if it's a cultural aspect." The school staff also recognised that many children were attending the school Kindergarten as well as the ELC Kindergarten. The need for flexibility of the pace of the transition was identified as critical to adjust to children's needs.

Teacher's voice

"Some children are used to transitions as they may move through many spaces in a day. We consider how many ELC children we have and where they attend. Do we need to slow it (the transition) down?"



Duplo set up as children had requested this.

Cultivate respectful, responsive relationships to build connection between children, families, educators, school, and community.

Cultivating relationships with children, families, educators, and the community was a priority for the ELC as the leader identified they are a "generational centre" where children start and continue for several years. General conversations were observed between staff and children that reflected knowledge of children and families with comments such as "You look just like your sister. That's why I said her name and not your name. I am still learning everyone's names". The ELC prioritises the opportunity for new families and children to visit the centre multiple times before the child's first booked day to cultivate a connection with children and families. New children and families do a tour of the centre, an interview with the director, and then three orientation visits before they start. Orientation is a one-hour visit for children and parents where they observe and participate in the program. Families are offered three orientation visits at different times, so they see different elements of the program. The community playgroup run by the ELC also familiarises children and families with the centre as the leader and teacher commented that many of these children attend the Pre-Kindergarten and then stay on into the Kindergarten room. The ELC Pre-Kindergarten children already enrolled are given several opportunities to visit the Kindergarten room before they move onto that room's roll by doing room visits in November and December. Parents are notified in writing when this is happening. Once the child has moved to the Kindergarten room the teacher has a catch-up meeting with the parents to discuss how their child's transition. A booklet is also sent out to parents along with a letter to say their child is transitioning, what to expect, room routines, and to introduce the teachers in that room. Incidental conversations between staff and parents during pick up and drop off also build positive relationships. The technology platform Educa is also used to exchange information with families to foster responsive relationships.

Parent's voice

"We started a countdown at home as to how many sleeps until she returned to the ELC after Christmas. She was building up to permanently being in that room. I told her who her teachers would be, and what things she would learn."

Design Principle 2: A shared vision for all stakeholders

Use clear, consistent communication that values sharing ideas and active listening to foster high levels of engagement and participation with children, families, and professional colleagues.

Using clear, consistent communication to improve the continuity and communication between the ELC Kindergarten and the school Kindergarten to support children's transitions led to positive changes during the project. Procedural changes such as recording each child's attendance at either the ELC Kindergarten or school Kindergarten assisted ELC staff to know the multiple spaces children were moving to throughout the day. Attendance was recorded by placing laminated images of children on the Kindergarten room display. A laminated image that represents each child who is in attendance is placed on the display which shows a yellow brick road between ELC Kindergarten room and the school Kindergarten. Similarly in the school Kindergarten a visual small world display is used to record children's movements. The children move a figurine person representing them to show if they are going to the ELC at the end of the day or going home. The school Kindergarten teacher commented that card figures of themselves made by the children will replace the figurines. Improving transitions for children is a continual process and catering for children who are full time (5 days) in the ELC Pre-Kindergarten and others who attend part time at the ELC Kindergarten (2/3 days) as they also attend the school Kindergarten provides continuing challenges.

The Kindergarten also found new COVID-19 protocols a challenge to children's transition to school as the first weeks were interrupted, and parents were asked not to enter the classroom. The school Kindergarten uses Seesaw to communicate regularly with families and show what is happening in the classroom. The ELC responded to this with more regular posts through the technology platform Educa used to communicate with parents. The ELC communicated with parents via many platforms such as email, newsletters, handbooks, in person and using the technology platform Educa.

This became especially important when COVID-19 restrictions were enforced, and room staff had very little opportunity to speak in person with parents. One parent commented when asked what would have improved the transition for their child, "I guess it's being able to speak to his educators more at drop off and pick up to see how things are going, whereas there's not really an opportunity to discuss anything with the educators to see how the transition is going at the moment." Staff used Educa to post stories about the what the children had been engaged with to ensure communication with parents did not halt. A letter introducing the staff in the room was also sent home electronically to families with photos of the staff. This helped to familiarise families with the staff as they did not have the opportunity to meet them personally.

Early years learning centre leader's voice

"Interactions with families are consistently reflected on for future improvement as a staff team, with our Educational Leader and our Leadership Team."



Display created to show who attends the school Kindergarten.

Collaboratively design a transparent blueprint of the 'transition game plan' that is culturally responsive to children, families and respects the values of the school's ethos.

The school leadership team and Kindergarten staff and ELC leadership team and ELC Kindergarten staff have worked together during this project to develop a more focused transition game plan to improve collaboration and communication between the two sites. As one leader commented, "The project has brought more togetherness as an early childhood Kindergarten team across both the school and ELC. It has made communication easier and has benefited children." The staff describe an 'opening up' between the two sites to be more responsive to children and families to improve their familiarity with both sites. More focused strategies have included a combined picnic at the school Kindergarten grounds for school and ELC Kindergarten children, cross visits where ELC children visit the school Kindergarten and the school Kindergarten children visit the ELC, book reading where staff swap classes to read a book, and staff visiting the two sites.

Other collaborative initiatives between the school Kindergarten and the ELC have included a focus on more intentional communication to support children as they transition not only into the school and ELC Kindergarten but for those children that move between the two sites. The term FoK and FoI is a common term now used between the school

and ELC staff to share information about children. The ELC teacher commented "It's (FoK and FoI) a common term that we use between the school and us." The ELC teacher commented that "The Pre kindy teacher and myself gave the school kindy staff a lot more information about the children that were coming up to them. The school has said that this has been really helpful." The ELC Kindergarten teacher also commented how the design principles developed as part of this project have "...sort of opened up a lot of communication between us (ELC) and the school Kindergarten. We share a lot more information, about children's funds of identity and the school Kindergarten is using it as a resource and then they can also give information back to us as well. So, for example, if a child is having a bad day at the school Kindergarten we give them a little bit more grace on their ELC Kindergarten days because the school has let us know this." Communication between the ELC and the school has also included sharing information about children during the handover and via email. The use of a technology platform to make this more efficient is also being investigated. Future plans involve looking at curriculum and reporting consistency to improve the communication between the ELC Kindergarten and school Kindergarten.

Teacher's voice

"We share a lot more information about children's funds of identity and the school are using it as a resource and then they can also give information back to us as well."



Front entrance to the ELC.



Communal eating area.

Design Principle 3: Leadership for powerful transitions

Focus attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families.

Focusing attention on transitions as a critical tool for change to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the long-term positive outcomes for children and families was required by leadership at both the ELC and the school. The Assistant Director of the ELC and Head of Early Learning at the school were both involved in the project. A more collegial relationship between school and ELC staff has led to productive changes with an 'opening up' of communication lines to commit to supporting children's transitions. The ELC staff and children visit the school more regularly and the school staff and children visit the ELC more often. The Kindergarten teachers at the school have visited the ELC to read a story, reporting consistency across the two sites has been examined and FoI and FoK details from the ELC kindergarten is shared with the school Kindergarten staff. The ELC Kindergarten teacher has also been included in professional development opportunities at the school. Other planned strategies include talks of building a yellow brick road from the ELC to the school and an end of year picnic meeting in term four to meet the new Kindergarten children at the ELC. A continued and intentional focus on maintaining open communication lines has been set between the school and the ELC to improve transitions for children. The ELC and school plan to reinstate transition reports from Childcare Kindy/Pre-Kindergarten to school.

Early years learning centre leader's voice

"From the ELC to the school we are focused on building a relationship with teachers and school to provide information on children to them."

Commit to leading and supporting staff involved in transitions, recognising the contributions and expertise of colleagues at all levels.

The ELC and school staff are committed to leading and supporting staff during the transitions project. The ELC and school Kindergarten staff became more focused and intentional with a deliberate focus on improving communication and collaboration. More time for collaboration for ELC and school Kindergarten teachers was provided by the leadership team with consideration of the most suitable time for the school Kindergarten staff being their DOTT day. The staff planned for transition visits between the school and ELC where ELC children were taken to the school Kindergarten for stories and morning tea. Plans were made for an electronic document to assist staff with changeovers for children who attend both the ELC and school Kindergarten that would allow staff to communicate about each child's needs. For example, if a child had an unsettled day at school in Kindergarten this would be communicated

to ELC staff so they could provide additional support. Email communication between the ELC and school staff continues to be the main channel to share information.

The school recognises the expertise of the staff at all levels during transitions. During the project, it was recognised that the ELC Kindergarten teacher would benefit from both formal and informal mentoring by school leadership. Plans are in place to initiate this during 2022. Both the school and ELC early childhood leaders have been encouraged to meet with their leadership teams to advocate for children during the transition. The school has considered increasing transition times to allow for unhurried time for children and families to transition successfully.

Teacher's voice

"Opening up our thinking and having time to delve has allowed us to reflect more deeply on transitions and how can we make the unique context of having the ELC on our site work together?"

Adapt and innovate flexibly in response to diverse and evolving priorities of all stakeholders.

Managing the transition of children in the ELC provides challenges for staff as they cater for existing and new children in the centre. Adapting and innovating flexibly in response to the evolving priorities of parents and the ELC was required. The ELC responded by making changes to the transition timeline to gather information about parents' intentions earlier. Late in 2021, the ELC sent out a 'letter of intention of attendance' to parents earlier than normal so staff could plan for the transition. This also helped to avoid confusion for children and parents, so they were aware of transition processes earlier. Changes were also made to the letter during the research project to allow for flexibility in the transitions if children were away on holidays. Additionally, the school holiday program was more tailored to children transitioning to Kindergarten rather than children leaving Kindergarten. Parents of children in Kindergarten in 2021 and going to Pre Primary at the school site in 2022 were encouraged to put children in before and after school care to leave a space for new children coming into Kindergarten. The majority of children who were already attending the centre in the three-year-old room completed a six-week transition program in January where they visited the Kindergarten room each week.

Early years learning centre leader's voice

"We should be working for the child rather than the child working for us."

New children usually completed three orientation visits with parents which were unfortunately cut short in 2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions that did not allow parents in the rooms. Instead, parents attended only once with their child. New COVID-19 procedures meant families brought their children to the front door of the ELC, recorded their arrival through a

written sign-in sheet and then a member of the administrative staff escorted children to their room. Building relationships with families was challenging during this time as staff missed out on having incidental conversations with families when they dropped and picked up their child. To overcome this, ELC staff used the technology platform Educa to post stories of what the children had been doing during the day.

Parent’s voice

“This was an exceptionally smooth transition aside from COVID-19. I read the stories the educators posted on the Educa app and that reassures me he is learning and happy.”

Teacher’s voice

“It has been really useful to find out more about children’s interests and families and use this in our planning.”

Teacher’s voice

“I think transitions are super important because if you start a child well their success at school is better.”

transition process provides familiarity with the environment and the staff. However, during this transition research project questions were raised as to how the ELC could improve the continuity between the ELC Kindergarten and the school Kindergarten and how educators could use children’s FoK and FoI in the program and environment. Embedded practices such as an ELC handbook, family tours, interviews with the Director and three orientation visits were seen to be supporting families and children during the transition. However, given that many children were attending both the ELC Kindergarten and the school Kindergarten improvement the continuity between the ELC and school to support these children was a priority. In the process of doing so, existing transition practices were identified to reimagine the transition. The three design principles assisted the ELC and school Kindergarten to focus on sharing knowledge of children’s FoK and FoI to support children’s transitions within their setting and between the two settings.

Conclusion

The ELC transition has evolved over the past two years to ensure children and staff are more settled. The graduated



Learning environment reflects the children’s interests and builds a sense of belonging.

Important Findings

In this section strategies that teachers found effective have been described.

Leadership and teamwork

It was apparent in the project that leadership and teamwork played an important role in transforming transitions. Leadership in this project was seen as a collaborative responsibility. Not only did teachers need support from designated leaders in hierarchical positions but each teacher was courageous in leading changes to their practice. Therefore, the EYLF principle of collaborative leadership and teamwork was practised. Apart from hierarchical leaders such as principals and deputies, all teachers exercised aspects of collaborative leadership and teamwork that “are built on a sense of shared responsibility and professional accountability” (EYLF, 2022, p.18).

Principal's voice

This project provided us, as a school, with a framework and principles to interrogate our practices and to explore how we could respond more effectively to provide for our children and families in this transition from home to school.”

There were several areas that were noted by researchers and described by project participants as helpful in reimagining transition practices:

Leaning in with an open mind – It made the teacher’s journey much easier when the hierarchical leader supported the early years team leader or principal by being ready to lean into the project with an openness to change practices. Additionally, where team members approached new ideas and ways of working with an open mind, transformations occurred.

Attentive Listening – Teachers described where leaders and team members who listened attentively and were interested in the new information gained and the design thinking journey, change was assisted.

Communication – Constant professional conversations with leaders allowed for the design thinking to be shared with other parts of the school. Thinking about transitions across the school in this way allowed some teachers the opportunity to lead and been seen as the ‘expert’.

Staffing and infrastructure support – Leaders who made infrastructure changes as needed such as: providing a staggered entry; providing an extra teaching assistant in the first few days; moving specialists across a timetable, and re-thinking moving young children to specialists in the first weeks or term.

Understanding the emotional impact of transitions and leading with empathetic relationships – Leaders and teachers in leadership positions who understood the emotional impact of transitions on very young children, their families and the staff that worked with them were more likely to support staff and their reimagining of the transition process. Teams who built empathetic relationships and supported each other transformed transitions.

Change management – Leaders who understood the change management process and used this knowledge and skills to assist teachers and families with change were a support to staff. Teachers within teams who understood they were change agents supported each other to make effective changes.

Safe educational environments – Teachers were supported when leaders who worked to build a safe workplace culture and encouraged discussions and researching of pedagogy and practice. Additionally, where teachers felt safe and trusted to ‘take risks’ to change their practice changes to transitions were facilitated.

Effective Transition Strategies

Collectively, the ten schools participating in the transitions project shared practical strategies that emerged or were enhanced through reflection upon the three guiding principles for successful transitions in their unique school settings.

Early years leader's voice

“Reflecting on our practice has reminded us to look through the eyes of the children.”

Orientation to transition

In this study, when teachers went back to school and prepared the nest (Phase 1) which gathered information from all stakeholders to establish what was thought and done about transitions, it became apparent that families were thinking about transitions long before schools and teachers. For some schools, families began talking about transition to each other and their children from birth. Pointing out the school as they passed, talking about how school might look for them and when they would go. This caught many teachers by surprise. Activities were then planned to talk to the community about the start to school years before the cohort might arrive at community events, fairs and other community occasions. Most activities however were centred around the year before, at the beginning of the year and throughout.

Year Prior

In the year prior to the children commencing school, the teaching staff considered how they might offer children and their families an opportunity to take their first ‘low stakes’ steps onto the school grounds. Casual events to welcome families and build positive rapport were successfully undertaken and, in some instances, enhanced through partnerships with pre-kindergarten programs and associations. Importantly, these opportunities paved the way for educators to begin gathering information about the children’s funds of knowledge and funds of identity in readiness for building a meaningful school program for the incoming children. Alongside these experiences, school enrolment processes such as interviews with the Principal, early childhood leader or class teacher, school tours, information evenings and provision of school information videos offered more formal opportunities to share information between home and school in preparation for school commencement.

An open door

Children and their families were welcomed into schools during the last months of the school year preceding commencement. In most instances, events were organised with the rationale of building the children's confidence in a new school-based setting through slowly building familiarity and creating an opportunity to cultivate positive relationships with families in the context of relaxed, personal exchanges.

Events and activities

Schools also planned events and activities to invite families and children into the school the at the end of the year before entry.

'Peek and Picnic'

'Peek and Picnic' events were open to community members to come and familiarise themselves with the staff and school early childhood environment. 'Peek and Picnic' provides an opportunity to meet potential and interested new families.

Kindy Cafés

Prospective parents and their children are invited to 'opt in' to a series of informal sessions in the Kindergarten setting to become familiar with 'spaces and faces'. During the final Kindy Café, the Kindergarten teacher takes photos of children with their family member engaged in a Kindergarten experience of their choosing, ready for the children to discover on display on their first days of school.

'Coffee Catch Up'

Prospective parents are invited to the school and introduced to key staff. Sessions typically run one and half hours and occur in the final weeks of the school year. Information about the school and the transition process is provided and parents are invited to ask questions. Staff may prepare playful tasks and encourage parents to join in. These are designed to familiarise parents with transitions and learning through play. Information about child developmental milestones for that age group may also be provided. Parents may be given a bag containing items such as a children's book, implements for blowing bubbles or playdough, and encouraged to brainstorm how to use these materials to extend children's learning through play. A copy of the booklet with their ideas can be provided later to parents.

Pre-school links

Pre-Kindergarten programs on the school or Early Learning Centre site provide the opportunity for teachers to meet children in the year prior. Planned 'visits' can be arranged for either small groups of children or individuals, accompanied by a Pre-Kindergarten teacher or Education Assistant. During these visits, the children can be introduced to the Kindergarten teacher, oriented to the Kindergarten setting, and may join in with the Kindergarten children in familiar routines such as simple mat sessions and child-directed play.

Gathering information about children's FoK and FoI

Teaching staff recognised the importance of embracing the children's FoK and FoI to facilitate a smooth transition to school. Gathering information about children's FoK and FoI enables teachers to build holistic understanding of each child and their family and plan ways to support the child's sense of connection between their home-based and school-based life. Teachers mindful of the child's perspective of starting school can seek information to help communicate their respect for each child and create connection points in the environment to support their sense of belonging.

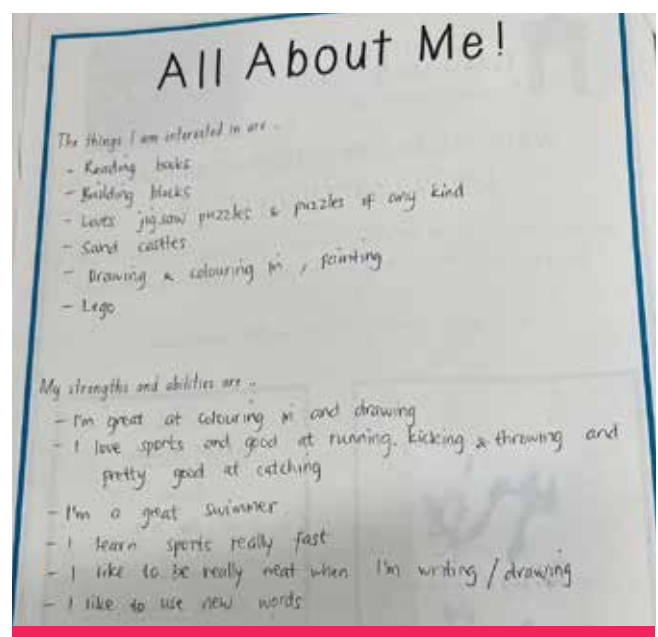
Surveys and questionnaires

Survey for support

Surveys can be sent to parents and guardians via an online parent communication platform to find out information about the children's strengths/interests and practical information about the children's fears/dislikes and how to calm them, toileting habits or concerns, sleeping habits including 'day sleeps' and food preferences/restrictions.

'All about me'

Surveys or questions designed to gather information about the children's FoK and FoI can be distributed to families of enrolled children in the year prior to commencement. Questions encourage families to share their insights about the child's identity and interests and encourage parents to share what they believe the teacher should know about their child. Questions may include: What adjectives would you use to describe your child? Who are the members in your family including pets? What languages are spoken at home? What are some of your child's interests, passions, and favourite things to do? What do they find challenging, and what else would you like us to know about your child?



Gathering information about children and their interests.

Sharing information with time to plan ahead

School staff were mindful of 'information overload' and thought strategically about how and when to disseminate information to parents. Parent information sessions can be delineated from events with children. Holding events in the evening can be considered to enable parents who may work to attend. These sessions also give parents an opportunity to engage with staff without the responsibility of supervising young children. In addition, the parents can begin building relationships with other parents in their child's cohort. Parent information sessions are also a good opportunity to communicate the school's values and successes as well as practical 'house-keeping' information such as drop-off points, school hours and accessing the uniform shop and school canteen.

Sharing the approach to early learning

Parent information sessions orient parents to the play-based pedagogy used in Kindergarten. Early transparency about a school's philosophy and opportunity to provide justification for their approach sets the tone for parents and schools to work in synergy for the benefit of the child and families. Parents can be provided information about what the approach would typically look like in the program. In some schools, informative videos are provided about their approach, including an orientation of some of resources and experiences used in Kindergarten with explanation of the learning they support.

Establishing an expectation for great things to come

Sharing Kindergarten highlights with parents such as Teddy Bears' picnics, Kindergarten productions and Star Gazing evenings helps to establish expectation of shared experiences with families to come and invites parents to participate and offer their own expertise. In one school, a short video presentation was shared at the parent information night which captured the highlights of the Kindergarten year and prompted anticipation and excitement amongst the parent body. Teachers can use videos such as these as a reference point when communicating with parents, especially in contexts where families speak English as an additional language.

Just before School Starts

Schools recognised the extended break across summer as potentially distancing for families and young children and considered how the week or two prior to starting school were critical for re-connecting, rekindling familiarity with the setting and teachers as well as personalising the transition for individual children. COVID-19 held a technological silver lining for teachers who experimented with video and virtual meetings to bridge home and school. The timing of this communication coincided with the delivery of 'welcome to school' packs for families and revision and integration of information gathered about FoI and FoK into planning.

My place – your place – our place

The use of video and virtual meetings is a significant innovation growing from the transitions project. The idea has been readily adopted by several schools in the project and is recognised as a fruitful method for bringing children and their families up to speed about what is being prepared for them at school. It also provides an interactive platform for building personal connections.

Videos of school

Induction video

Induction videos for parents and children can be recorded by the teacher. Teachers record a video of the classroom and filmed each area, speaking to the children about what they could do in that space. Teachers can also step through routines for arriving at school including where to put school bags, drink bottles and hats. A virtual tour of the bathroom and talking about what parents will do at drop off time can also be helpful inclusions.

Again! Again!

Families reported their children requested to view and re-view the videos, focusing on learning the faces of the teaching staff, and stepping through routines for starting the day. If their child became anxious about school. Parents can be encouraged to provide opportunities for their child to watch the video again, when needed, for reassurance.

Getting personal

Virtual Meetings

Brief virtual meetings via Zoom or Teams can be held with children and families to provide a window to children's home contexts. Virtual meetings offer an intimate shared experience where it is just the child, their family, and teacher. In these meetings, the child may be 'on the move' sharing their home, their pets and the things that are important to them as physical reference points for sharing their identity and knowing with their teacher.

Post cards

Postcards can be individually addressed to children to let them know their teacher is excited to see them. The teacher shares something personal about their own FoI and FoK with a photo. For example, they may share an interest in stand-up paddle boarding to create a starting point for informal conversations at school with individual children and their families.

'Play dates'

A 'play date' for children and parents can be held in the week before school commences. Children can engage in indoor and outdoor play of their choice whilst informal conversations between the parents, teacher and Education Assistant allow for last-minute questions to be answered and information from parents to be gathered.

Gathering information at orientation events

Orientation events such as picnics and 'play dates' provide teachers with important opportunities to gather authentic information about the children's FoK and FoI in the context of their new school-based setting. Teachers can take these opportunities to observe the children's movements and interests and use this for planning the transition. Photos reflecting the children's interests and knowledge can be taken, and observations recorded to guide the teacher's provision of resources reflective of the children's interests. Knowledge gathered about the children can be shared between teaching staff to support a unified response. In addition, simple tasks can be set for children and their families to complete at home in preparation for their transition into school. For example, providing a family photo or preparing a poster about the child's interests and experiences. These resources can then be integrated into the learning environment as touch points of belonging and provocations for further talk with and about the child.

Partners in preparing for school

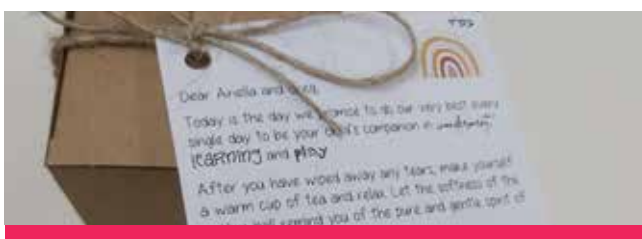
Teachers noted that successful transitions require partnerships be built with the many stakeholders involved. Home-school partnerships are powerful in shaping the child's sense of security and expectations of school.

Welcome pack

Welcome packs for children can be posted or emailed to families in the weeks prior to starting school. The packs are a practical resource with information for parents about the start of school such as what to bring, opening and finishing times and if required, schedules for a staggered start to school, photos of the staff and a simple daily timetable. They can be supplemented with ideas to help parents prepare their child, and themselves, for commencing school. For example, using their Kindergarten lunch box at home for a few days so they can practice opening it.

The parent transition

Transition to school is 'big' in both the child's and the parent's life. Teachers can be responsive to parents as partners in the transition who are undergoing a significant transition themselves. Children and parents are reforming their identities as members of a school community – children as a kindy/school child and parents as the parent of a school aged child. Knowing information ahead of time such as parking, how to come in and what is expected and how they may like to assist, eases parental anxiety of transitions.



Take home comfort pack for parents.



Making a traditional recipe on display at the Jewish school in the home corner, something familiar to children in the class.

Getting ready

Planning for children to connect and build a sense of belonging

The lead-up to school commencement is marked by teacher planning that is mindful of the children's FoI and FoK. Provocations and invitations to learning experiences in the environment can be built upon the information teachers have gathered. Resources can be thoughtfully selected with the intent of bringing a sense of homeliness to school, and the space organized to support individual children to feel they belong and have a space to be. It is important that teachers make the connection for children of what is linked to their FoK and begin to build the child's sense of belonging and identity as a learner in that space.

Bringing home to school

Home away from home

Teachers can create a homely atmosphere with familiar elements for the children to assist a smooth transition. For example, warm lighting and soft furnishing, and furniture such as a lounge in the book corner, or a dining table and chairs as a drawing table can be integrated into the environment. Walking through toileting routines can also alleviate the uncertainty or anxiety experienced by some children and their parents about using the bathroom.



Creating a home like environment.



A writing table set up using a dining table similar to those used at home.



Homely furniture to create a sense of familiarity across learning environments.

Our playlist

Teachers can tap into positive experiences in the children's lives by collecting and including their favourite songs. A playlist can be created to use in the daily program, for example, during fitness and dance experiences.

Owning the space

My special place

The children can be provided a 'special place' just for them to put belongings. Familiar routines requiring the children to frequently access their 'special place' across the first few days can be used to build ownership of this space. For example, asking them to stow things away or retrieve items from their special place, to reinforce a sense that the child is a class member and belongs.

Teacher's voice

"Last year the parents said their child didn't have a place they belonged in the class, so we really made sure that was there to kickstart the connection process."



A quiet space children can use for reading and reflection.

Quiet places

Some parents reported their child was unaccustomed to large groups and found them overwhelming. To address this, the teacher can intentionally plan private, quiet places to give the children a place to escape and self-regulate new emotions.

"This is me"

Many teachers collect and display family photos ready for the first day. These are positioned to be accessible to the children – at child's eye level. This provides a place for children to return to during the day and see familiar faces, to show others and explain the family they belonged to, and to find out about the families of other children and their teacher. Staff can also display photos of their own families to provide a connection point with children and parents.

Once school starts

Commencement of school marks a key milestone in the transition process for all stakeholders. It is a pivotal period from which children and their families establish their new school-based identity and foundational perceptions about school. Schools in the project described both structural and pedagogical decisions they needed to make which would impact the quality of transition. Consideration was given to time, space, and flexibility to respond, 'in the moment', holding educators in good stead as they prepared to navigate the evolving milieu of the first weeks of school. Handovers were supported, new beginnings chartered together, and communication prioritised to build and maintain positive partnerships and effective transitions ongoing.

Time and space

Time needs to be considered in relation to both daily programming and structural arrangements, to enable the children to interact with others in a child-paced manner and sustain their energy across the introductory period of change. The impact of the physical space and volume of people should also be considered, and strategies employed responsively by the teacher to disarm anxieties and establish a harmonious social culture.

Child-paced transition

Staggered starts

Schools can adopt a staggered start to school, for example, with half the class for half days for the first two days. This allows children more time and space to 'move in' to their classroom, become familiar with spaces in their room and learn new routines at a slowed pace with higher personal support. Parents can also be invited to attend the first session with an option to stay for a second session to assist the child to settle in, witness a positive relationship forming between their parent and the teacher, and build a secure bond between home to school.

Early finish

Parents frequently talked about their child's energy levels and ability to sustain the demands of full days of school when first commencing, with some explaining their child needed to stay home days in the first few weeks to recover from exhaustion. Teachers can be responsive to this by being attuned to when the children are tiring, especially in full day programs. In some schools, the day length is reduced, for example, with children going home at 1pm in the first few days. In others, teachers intentionally program times for rest during the day enabling children to relax and recharge.

Responsive pedagogy

Just in time

Raising the profile of transitions through a FoK and Folens empowers teachers to make changes to the program 'in the moment' and respond to the arising need of the children. For example, teachers may opt to move outdoor play to the start of day to accommodate increased 'traffic' in the classroom at school drop-off. Teachers may also use their professional judgement to experiment and change planned departure routines as needed. Teachers can also be responsive to the children's level of engagement in an experience. For example, if the children are losing interest, they can move on and be prepared to 'go with the flow', adopt less formal learning strategies, and explore more child-oriented strategies that consider the child's perspective. Teachers who are flexible and responsive to children acknowledge smooth transition require the children be afforded additional time for free play to help the children settle and establish social relationships.

Bibliotherapy for new beginnings

Bibliotherapy can be used to assist children to establish their 'school' identity. Bibliotherapy is a term used to describe the use of literature to connect with children's feelings and a new setting. Typically, the selected literature tells social stories of literal experiences of starting school or related experiences such as venturing into the world and returning home or discovering joy in new experiences. Bibliotherapy provides important conversation openers for children and teachers about their transition to school.



First day books chosen to connect to children's feelings.

Space to warm up and engage

Space for settling in

Physical space and movement through the classroom and outdoor space can be planned with consideration of where and how the child may enter the room with their parent at school drop-off, the positioning of 'special spaces' for stowing items from home, what resources would be made accessible to children and the children's anticipated need for floor space. Making play spaces visible and open assists children with decisions about what to try or where to be.

Teachers can also accommodate children's requirement for more open space for free play. Allocating additional staff for the first couple of weeks may be required to support children who may have additional needs to navigate the new space securely. Staff may find the outdoor space invaluable to soothe unsettled children and establish a calm atmosphere.

Agency to choose

Teachers intentionally use information gathered about the children's FoI and FoK to provide invitations for children to engage in the environment that are meaningful, familiar and/or provoked interest. Children can be afforded agency to choose what to engage in and with whom, and how long to engage both during indoor to outdoor play opportunities. A booklet can be provided for parents on the first day that describes each space, how children can engage and why the activity is important.

Relaxed handovers

Teachers can extend an invitation to parents to stay in the classroom longer in the morning, potentially for a full initial session. Parents of unsettled children can be invited to stay longer to provide additional support for their child. These extended parental stays afford the teacher additional time to talk casually with parents, forge strong partnerships and pave unique negotiated transition strategies for individual children when needed.



Parents can be invited to stay with their child for the first session of school.

There is no bell to signal you to leave in the morning. We aim to have all children settled and parents departed by 9:10.

Please depart quickly once your child is playing contently, as lingering can cause a happy child to become upset when you do eventually leave.

Our aim is to have a gradual departure of parents over a 20 minute period. This allows us to attend to those children one-on-one who may need a little more support to settle.

Enjoy your day while we embark on amazing adventures at

Little Wollies!

Notices such as this assist parents with what to expect and how to handle entry with their children.

The parent lounge

Teachers noted the importance of opportunities for parents to build relationships with other parents, which can frequently lead to parents arranging gatherings with other school-based families outside of school time, further supporting the families' sense of belonging to the school community. Variations of a 'parent lounge', a community space where parents could 'mingle' after dropping off their children can be created for this purpose. These can also serve as 'half-way' spaces for concerned parents to stay close in case their child has not settled readily.

A culture of communication

Communication is a critical component of a successful transition. Holding a shared vision about the importance of an effective transition is instrumental in establishing a culture of communication that holds the well-being of children central in the transition process. Teachers should aim to communicate clearly and consistently with all stakeholders including children, parents/carers, staff in the room, administrative staff, and the community. Importantly, teachers can become active in listening to stakeholders, as co-constructors of a collective transition.

Keeping everyone in the loop

Newsletters

Newsletters can be used as a regular communication to families. These may be emailed, include photos, for example, 'first-day' photos and explain what the children enjoy and engage in. Newsletters can be sent home more frequently across the first couple of weeks and evolve into regular weekly newsletters.

News boards

News boards or easels in or outside the classroom can be used to communicate important daily information to parents. These are welcoming and succinct communications about, for example, exciting upcoming events, birthday announcements or things to remember for the following day. They can also be used to ask for information from parents about their children, for example, writing on the board one thing your child did on the weekend.

Online

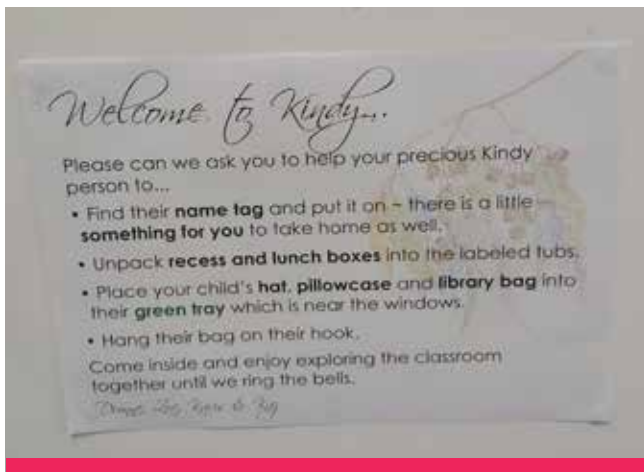
Online communication platforms such as See-saw provide a platform for uploading images and interacting more personally with parents about the day-to-day experiences with the children. However clear parameters were set with parents about when to expect this and for most schools something went out weekly and did not involve all children.

Visual timetables

Visual timetables can be used by teachers to communicate to the children what is going to happen during the day. The children can 'check' the visual timetable which may use a sequence of images discussed at the start of the day. The teacher may also use these images to cue the children into what is happening next, assisting children to plan ahead and regulate their expectations. Similarly, where to put things can be clearly signposted.

Parent's voice

"I feel like I'm part of the journey with them."



A welcome note for parents to outline what they and their child need to do as they enter for the first day.



Visually labelled containers for storage and easy access to recess and lunch items.



Visual sequencing of daily activities to support routine predictability.

Staff approachability and building inclusiveness

Just being there

Teachers can aim to be 'present' every morning in the classroom to acknowledge each child and parent/carer as they arrive. Teachers may also need to be discerning about parents whose informal discussions at school drop-off indicate a need for a longer conversation. In these instances, teachers can be diligent about making timely appointments with parents for longer conversations so as not to disrupt the daily program.

Inclusive communication

Children and families speaking languages other than English can be accommodated in several ways. Teachers can take steps to find out about language differences from the information they gather prior to commencing school. Learning and offering greetings in other languages has a significant impact upon the parents' openness to engage in conversation. Finding volunteer interpreters among the parent body to support communication with families who were new arrivals to Australia can also support inclusive communication. In addition, lanyards with visual cards of essential communications (for example, with images of the playground, lunch, toilet) can be used to connect with and guide children who do not speak English.

Teachers as advocates and change agents for effective transitions

Intentional listening

With a focus on facilitating effective transitions, teachers become more deliberate about listening to key stakeholders. Actively building a culture of listening and of sharing information about children and their families between staff is a common theme supporting successful transitions. Shared understanding of children's circumstances also facilitates more open dialogue with parents allowing them to feel their concerns had been heard. In addition, simple strategies can be used as a show of intent to build partnerships, such as being more focused on learning the names of children's parents and using parent names in conversations.

Leading for effective transition

Gaining the support of the leadership team and understanding their role in guiding a shared vision is important for transforming transition across the school. This support also allows the teacher freedom to think creatively about possible strategies to ensure that children's FoK and FoI are used in ways that are visibly responsive to each child.

Stability of staff

Notions of a 'long transition' highlight the need for stability amongst staff and to nurture working relationships for building effective transition strategies over a period of years. Stability among staff in the early childhood years is also important for children and their families as they anticipate and look for familiar faces as their child approaches school commencement.

Leader's voice

"No-one was wedded to what we were doing so there was no ego or investment or emotional attachment to what we were already doing."

Articulating philosophy or learning

Teachers who could clearly articulate how reimagining the transition assisted with their realisation of the school's early childhood philosophy appeared to have more support from leadership. Parents also could articulate why teachers were using some strategies because the importance and the process of transition was explained to them in ways they could understand.

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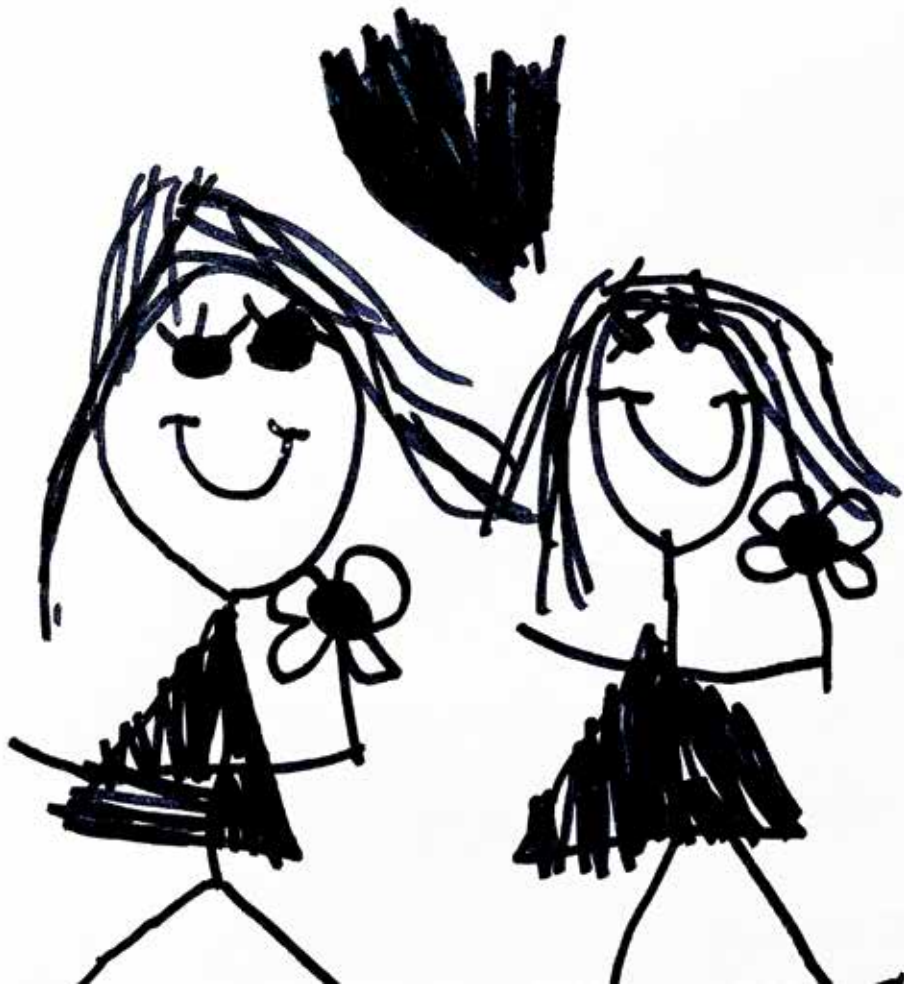
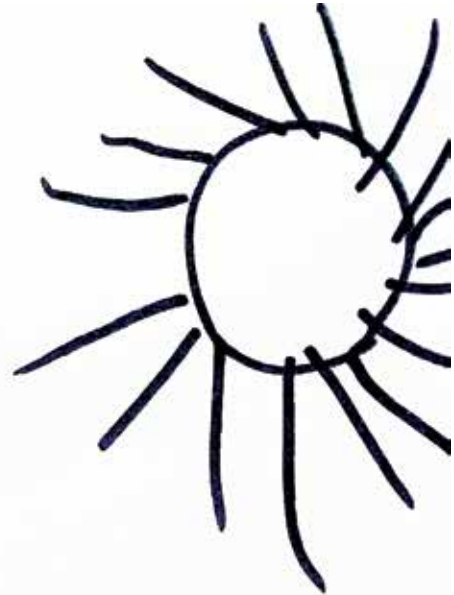
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Contact

P 134 328

P (61 8) 6304 0000 (Outside Australia)

E enquiries@ecu.edu.au

W ecu.edu.au

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