Australian Research Alliance
for Children & Youth

Building a Solid Foundation
for School -
a Communities Approach

This topical paper has been developed for the
Communities for Children Facilitating Partners.

Prepared by
Reesa Sorin - James Cook University, Queensland
Jane Markotsis – Mission Australia's Communities for Children, Cairns South, Queensland
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ARACY is a national organisation with members based across Australia.

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a Communities Approach

Reesa Sorin James Cook University

Jane Markotsis Mission Australia, Communities for Children,

Cairns South Queensland, Australia

SUMMARY

This paper argues that there is more to a successful start to school than the characteristics of an individual child. Readiness for learning and development in the school years depends on a partnership comprising the child, their family, the school, the community and the services provided by and in the community forming a solid foundation. To build a solid foundation ongoing, integrated programs from a variety of providers that address cognitive, physical, social, emotional and behavioural issues need to be accessible to young children, their families, schools and communities. The *Communities for Children Initiative (CfC)* is one such program.

The *CfC Initiative* is one of four strands in the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004 – 2009 that came about as a result of Australia's National Agenda for Early Childhood. Forty-five communities have been targeted by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), to achieve better outcomes for children from birth to five years and their families. Targets include better school readiness, through a collaborative approach to early child and maternal health; early learning and care; child-friendly communities; supporting families and parents; and working together in partnerships. Partners in these collaborations include: three tiers of government; non-government organizations; service providers; and most importantly, families and children. Supported by researchers and academics, partners work and interact collaboratively to ensure school readiness. Other initiatives of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy that are directed at children are *Invest to Grow, Local Answers* and *Choice and Flexibility in Child Care*. In addition FaHCSIA supports a number of other programs some of which are specifically for indigenous children and families e.g. *Responding Early Assisting Children (REACh), Child Care Links* and *Indigenous Children's Programs*.

Children in the process of becoming ready for school where their competence is recognised and changes and adjustments form part of a collaborative process between partners. Conceptualisations of children as

innocent and powerless that have permeated early childhood education since the onset of the Kindergarten movement have been, reconstructed to the image of the *agentic* child [1]. The *agentic* child is defined as a social actor who participates in his/her life and co-constructs education with adults and peers [2]. It is the collaboration between the child and the adults that makes for a successful process. Indeed, recent policies focusing on young children assert this view. For example, Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics states, "New research has allowed significant changes in understandings to emerge that reposition children as citizens with entitlements and rights. Increasingly, children are seen as competent and capable and able to participate in the negotiation of their learning and social experiences" [3]. It further states that in relation to children, "early childhood educators will recognize them as active citizens participating in different communities and acknowledge children as competent learners." The agency accorded to children within this construct needs to be recognized with caution: "It can be tempting to regard children as the recipients of transition programs, rather than as active participants who are shaped by and who shape the experience" [4:14]. In this regard the authors suggest that the *Readiness Formula*; Ready Families + Ready Communities + Ready Services + Ready Schools = Children Ready for School [5] be rewritten as follows to acknowledge children's role as active participants (agents):

> **Ready Communities and Services + Ready Schools + Ready Families + Ready Children = Readiness for learning and development in the school years**

This rewritten formula acknowledges all partners as actively collaborating and contributing to readiness for learning and development in the school years. This paper uses the above formula to discuss *CfC* and other programs that help build a solid foundation for school. They are addressed under the headings of *Ready Children; Ready Families; Ready Schools* and *Ready Communities and Services*.

In most cases programs actually support more than one component of the readiness equation. For example, Cairns South *CfC's Play for Learning and Fun* is introduced under *Ready Families*. A main function of the activity is to support families in becoming ready for learning and development in the school years. By offering play experiences in which young children actively participate this program is also helping develop Ready Children. By locating on school grounds, interacting with school personnel and operating at school hours, it is also considered under the heading *Ready Schools*.

The many functions of the *CfC Play for Learning and Fun* activity demonstrate an important principle of the readiness equation; each partner does not act alone or have sole responsibility for school readiness. Indeed it is an interactive process where several partners work together to meet multiple readiness needs.

Partnerships between children, parents, families, teachers in prior to school and formal schooling, school personnel, community and/or service providers can be established to take positive steps toward school readiness. As McCain, Mustard and Shanker say, "Linking the activities provided by the partners and developing a common pedagogical approach provides a consistent learning and care environment for children and more accessible entry for parents. A joint commitment to the application of effective practices enhances quality, and therefore, children's developmental opportunities" [6:160].

METHODOLOGY

This paper has been prepared for the Facilitating Partners of *Communities for Children Initiatives (CfC)* around Australia providing services for children 0-5 years, their families and carers. It follows on from previous papers on the topic of school readiness. The draft paper was workshopped in an interactive Webinar presentation on 30 April 2008. The theoretical basis builds on the *School Readiness Equation*; ready communities and services; ready schools; ready families; and ready children [5]. The Glossary on page 42 included at the request of the Webinar participants clarifies the different terms applied in the different states and territories of Australia to the year prior to school entry and the first year of school. Examples from practitioners that build a solid foundation for children in preparation for school entry have been included. Table 1 includes a comparison of programs and activities most of which come from *CfC* sites. A further discussion based on the work of Meisels [7] forms Appendix 1. This precedes a comparative table of measures of school readiness arranged according to Meisels' four constructs provided as Appendix 2. The story of Emma's transition to school in both her own words and her mother Vivienne's reflections are threaded through the paper.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING READY FOR SCHOOL

After a year of prior to school care, (*see Glossary p42) and a summer with her mother and two older brothers, five year old Emma reported that her first day of formal schooling was 'good' and that she felt: " … *shy, because I didn't know any of my friends."*

 "*I didn't cry but my mum cried. … It's easy to go to big school because at play time all you have to do is play."*

Having friends and a warm welcome to school seemed important to Emma as indicators of her readiness for learning and development in school.

Dockett & Perry note that "Children seem to measure their success at school by whether or not they have friends" [8:4] and many negative feelings they had around going to school related to not knowing what was going to happen within the school environment.

In early childhood, and indeed throughout life, humans go through a number of transitions. According to Bridges, transitions are different from changes because they involve not only the outcome, but also a "process of letting go of the way things used to be and then taking hold of the way they subsequently become" [9:2]. At birth, babies must let go of the safe environment of the womb and travel through the birth canal, to arrive in a world very different to that which was left to begin the life process. Beginning care and formal education are other transitions in early childhood. In Bridges' view, transition implies a sense of loss; that is, to progress from one stage in life to another requires losing something or leaving behind old ways or old things. The process of starting school should not be surrounded by loss and grief; rather it should be a time of optimism and excitement, as solid foundations, which have been built over time, support the transition to a new way of being – that of a school student.

"Readiness for school is influenced by children's early years and the factors that shape those early years, including: family functioning, parenting styles, community support, neighbourhood safety and socio-economic factors" [14:2].

Programs to support early learning and development should be readily available to young children, their families, schools and communities. But rather than short-term offerings, they should be ongoing, integrated programs from a variety of providers that address cognitive, physical, social, emotional and behavioural issues.

Vicki Johnson, Program Manager *CfC* Townsville West [15], positions school readiness in her *Community Interdependence Model* as one of the processes upon which *CfC* activities are impacting. The model spans the prenatal period to the time of school entry and incorporates principles of

open communication and diversity. It seeks to identify connections between factors that impact on the health, wellbeing and development of young children and links them to the *CfC* Priorities. This cycle, is illustrated below (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - *Community Interdependence Model* **(Johnson, 2008) [15]**

School Readiness

Education

Children's Health and Well being

Employ-ment and Income

Community Interdependence Model
(Johnson, 2008)

Parenting Skills

Accessing Resources

Parental Health

Social Capital
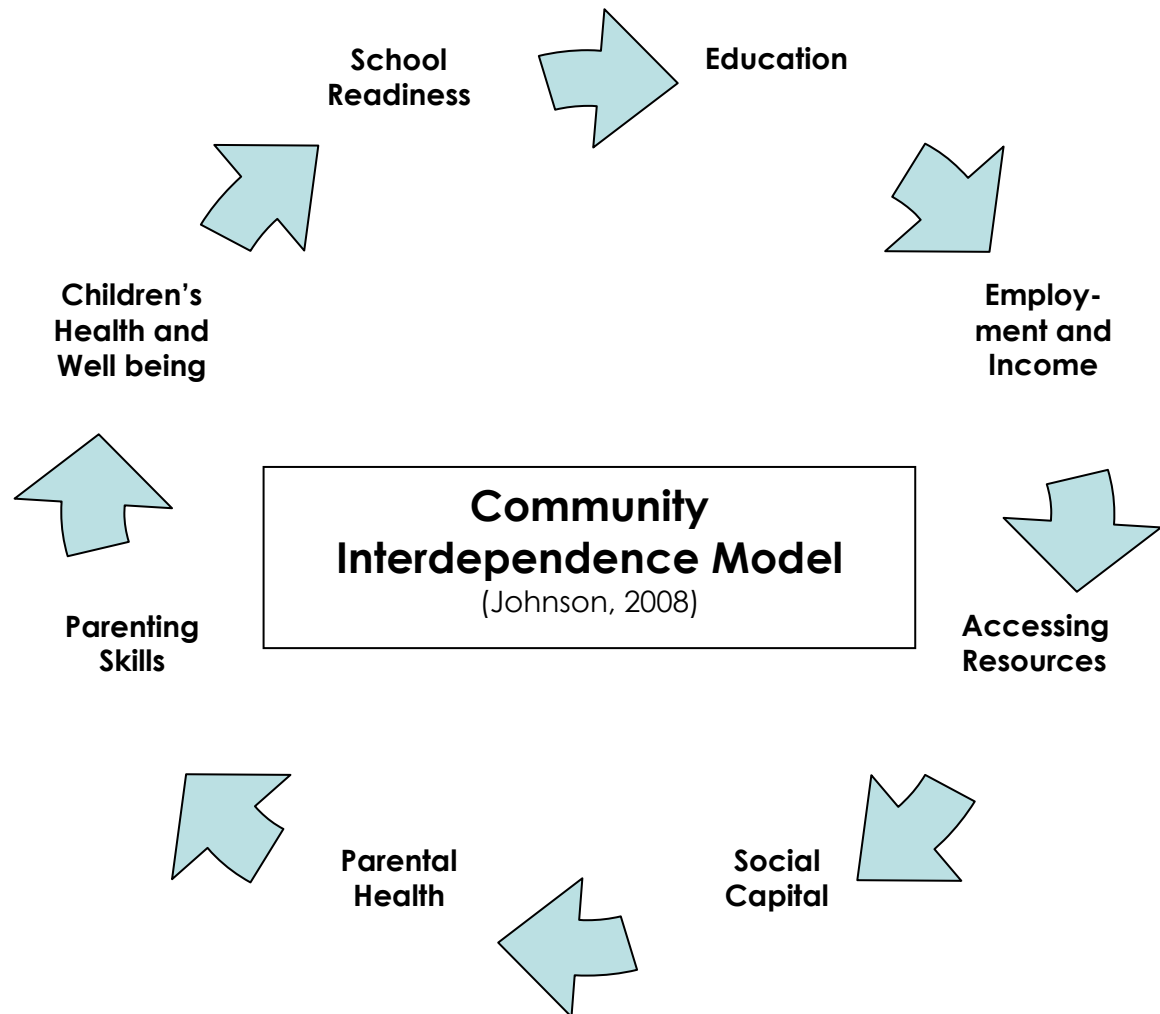
Informed by the National Agenda for Early Childhood and using this model, *CfC* Townsville West sought to develop strategies that were able to meet immediate needs in the early years' service system as well as in the long term being able to build a sustainable system. Recognising that providing quality services in the early years improves a child's learning, development and health outcomes, they have taken a coordinated approach, where

several players interact to improve outcomes for children 0-5 years and their families in Townsville West. Activities are based on the need for information and accessible services, and the crucial roles the environment and social capital play (resources and experience that people bring to the situation) in the development of young children. The *Community Interdependence Model* acknowledges that community development programs that build on the existing strengths of the community and families and incorporate elements of ownership are more likely to achieve sustainable, long-term outcomes.

Partnerships between service providers and families promote a more child-friendly community. For example, *Children's Champions* in Cairns South *CfC* have gathered information to assist families in accessing programs and services for themselves and their young children.

The *Interactionist View* of school readiness [7] focuses on interactions between the child's characteristics and characteristics of the environment as determinants of readiness. Maxwell and Clifford say: "School readiness, in the broadest sense, involves children, families, early environments, schools and communities. Children are not innately ready or not ready for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families" [16].

Relationships between children, families, schools, communities and community services support the process of becoming ready for school. Stimulating relationship experiences help children to begin schooling with positive attitudes to learning whereas the lack of these experiences or negative experiences are thought to undermine children's success at school. As the Centre for Community Child Health Policy Brief No. 10 (2008) says "What and how they (children) learn depends upon the nature and quality of the relationships they have with their parents and caregivers, and the richness and variety of the experiences they are provided during their early years."

The *Interactionist View* reflects Bronfenbrenner's ecological model [17] as the microsystem (the child), the mesosystem (families and schools) and the

exosystem (communities, governments, and societies) interact and work towards school readiness. Acknowledging that parents play a most important role in school readiness, Healthy Child Manitoba [14] states that "other family members and communities also play an important role. Safe and supportive neighbourhoods as well as access to quality early childhood programs are also linked to children's readiness for school". Starting school is " … not just an experience for the individual child. Rather, it is a community experience, involving a wide range of people … the nature of relationships between and among children, families, peers, and early childhood educators has a significant impact on children's sense of belonging and acceptance within a school community" [4:4]. They recommend that educators and parents develop positive relationships with children, particularly as they move from prior to school to formal schooling. The child's role in school readiness is apparent within the *Interactionist View*. Furthermore they advise that educators "respect children for who they are and the understandings, skills and abilities they have. They may not demonstrate the things that adults think are important, but nevertheless, they have achieved a great deal in all areas by the time they start school" [8: 85].

THE READINESS EQUATION

The *National School Readiness Indicators Initiative* (adopted in some states of the USA) [18 and 19] put forward the *Ready Child Equation* of "Ready Families + Ready Communities + Ready Services + Ready Schools = Children Ready for School". This is also the focus of the CCCH Centre for Child Health Policy Brief No. 10 (2008). Farrar et al point out that the child focused emphasis of the initiative, where different actors work together to produce school readiness could be re-named the *School Readiness Equation* where schools become ready for children based on "resources and relationships available in the community" [19:7]. Both of these views imply a number of adults working toward an end product: a *ready child*. But do they acknowledge the active role children play in partnership with families,

schools and community services in becoming ready for learning and development in the school years?

Children should be active agents in the process of becoming ready for school. While adults may guide the processes of preparing for school, based on their own learning experiences and resources [20], it is the collaboration between the child and the adults that makes for a successful process. Recent research has highlighted the input of children's voices along with those of adults as important informants in data collection and analysis. Indeed, recent policies focusing on young children assert this view. For example, Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics states "New research has allowed significant changes in understandings to emerge that reposition children as citizens with entitlements and rights. Increasingly, children are seen as competent and capable and able to participate in the negotiation of their learning and social experiences" [3]. It further states that in relation to children, early childhood educators will recognize them as active citizens participating in different communities and acknowledge children as competent learners.

The agency accorded to children within this new construct needs to be recognized because, as Dockett and Perry caution: "It can be tempting to regard children as the recipients of transition programs rather than as active participants who are shaped by and who shape the experience" [4:14]. In this regard we suggest that the readiness formula be rewritten so that the end product is not the child, but that to acknowledge the child's role along with other partners as active participants in children becoming ready for learning and development in their school years.

The following discussion showcases *CfC* activities via practitioner accounts of initiatives and includes examples from other programs which build a solid foundation through partnerships. It acknowledges 'transition' as a process of change and 'readiness' as having the resilience and skills to successfully undertake that change. The authors note that in most cases the activities and programs actually support more than one component of the readiness equation and that some examples contain only anecdotal evidence at this

stage because they are time-limited activities and programs. It is only when all needs are addressed that communities and services become ready, schools become ready, families become ready and children become ready for learning and development in the school years.

READY COMMUNITIES AND SERVICES

The responsibility for transition programs [lies within] the broader community rather than with the school alone [19]. *Ready Communities and Services* refers to geographic areas where integrated services contribute social and cultural capital to support families with young children as they prepare for formal schooling. Processes involved include collaboration, cooperation and resource sharing amongst services. As reported by Valentine, Katz and Griffiths [11:32] "Non-government and state agencies, and key community representatives, work together towards common aims, and are provided with the resources to do so." *Ready Services,* also refers to the availability, quality and affordability of programs and services that positively support child development and contribute directly and indirectly to school readiness" [36].

Ready Communities offer high quality services. Research to date has shown that it is the quality of the service delivered that makes a difference to children and family outcomes, so that the higher the quality the greater the impact on school readiness [11:5]. The quality of the service is determined by the number and frequency of interventions, size of the target population and the measurable effect and affect that can be attributed to a particular program.

Valentine et al [11] describe models of integration, such as co-location of services; community outreach from existing services; multi-service centres or community hubs in new or existing buildings and expansion of multi-service agencies and working groups to include more services or to take on a new role in service planning and management for the region.

The *Early Years Centres* being implemented by the Queensland Government are one example of this approach. The *Early Years Centres* offer universal services for children from pre-birth to eight years of age and their families, with some targeted services for vulnerable children and families. These centres form a hub and satellite model with outreach services provided from pre-existing locations (Queensland Government Dept of Communities, 2007). Links to CfC activities have been established via supported playgroups, pre-reading programs, nutrition projects, parent education and via *Early Years Committees* (service provider networks).

Integration of service delivery is strongly supported by governments in Australia. As Valentine et al [11: 3] point out; government policy involves formation of new strategies, departments, new inter-ministerial committees. One of the ways in which they translate policies to services is through Human Services Officers Groups who meet for a particular purpose (e.g. *Families NSW* previously *Families First*) is delivered jointly by 5 government agencies that meet in State and regional committees. Initially the lead agency was the Cabinet Office, a position now held by Department of Community Services [11:31].

Greater collaboration within the non-government sector is taking place as a result of strategies and initiatives like *CfC* particularly where services are delivered through either a physical or virtual hub such as South Australia's *Virtual Village* [11:33]. The villages include integrated child care, preschool, early years of school, child health and family support services, located on school sites. New South Wales has *Schools as Community Centres*; a key service model of Families NSW employing a full time facilitator in a community centre based at a public school.

PROGRAMS FOR READY COMMUNITIES AND SERVICES

While school readiness programs generally target more than one partner in the readiness process, there are in addition some programs whose main

target groups are the community at large and services within the community not only the key target groups of families with young children. Community and Services programs seem to operate in three different ways: to assess community needs and help with decision-making; to promote awareness of and activities that support school readiness; and to provide activities that help with school readiness.

Assessing community needs and helping with decision-making

As communities differ in demographics, they do so as well in their needs and strengths, particularly in working towards a solid foundation for school. Programs that assess community needs and develop strategies accordingly provide strong support for young children and their families.

Cairns South *CfC's* activity *Children's Champions,* sponsored by Mission Australia and Far North Queensland Volunteers Inc, engages with community organisations including schools, pre-schools, day care and play groups to gather information about community needs. They use a ground-up, community development approach to local child and family issues, starting with what strengths and resources people have and developing their capacity to work within the community addressing these issues. In October 2007, *Children's Champions*, along with other *CfC* Activities in Cairns South, supported *Babinda Fun Day*, a free school holiday activity for the Babinda community. They staffed a stall, distributed fliers, informed groups, visited sponsors and presented activities for local children. The success of this event for Babinda parents and families included the free information, entertainment and child-centred activities during school holidays; the displays from *CfC* Community Partners and the participation of agencies based in Innisfail that deliver services to Babinda.

Promoting awareness of school readiness issues

Community-based programs that promote the importance of attending school can support school readiness. There are many and varied reasons for

families not connecting with or promoting school engagement for themselves and their children. Not all families value the importance of school attendance and may in fact have a negative attitude towards school, based on their own experiences. Often attempts by the school to ensure attendance are met with hostility from families and children.

Mt Isa *CfC's Culture of Education* activity, sponsored by Mt Isa Centacare and Healy Primary School is based at Yallambee, an Aboriginal community in the centre of Mt Isa. The activity helps children and their families get ready for school by promoting a culture of school. The program provides breakfast, school clothing, text books and transport to school. In 2006, none of the children in the community attended school. By 2007, 6 attended and in 2008, 26 children attend school. "The idea was to ensure future generations would attend school as we believe that no single factor is more important in instigating and sustaining disadvantage than an inadequate education" said Maryann Devine, Project Manager of Mt Isa *CfC*. The activity is a holistic one as the outcomes are around health, nutrition, social skills, language acquisition, routine and parent involvement.

Literacy is an aspect of the cognitive domain and thus an important component of school readiness. Snow notes that "children's skills at school entry are highly correlated with later skills, especially in literacy domains" [21:8]. Literacy learning begins early in life and needs to be supported by families, educational services and communities. We cannot assume that every child is exposed to books and reading material and read to regularly. Community programs that meet the needs of children and families in specific communities can strongly support early literacy development.

Inala to Goodna *CfC's Let's Read* program sponsored by Mission Australia and the Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland (C&K Child Care), is a comprehensive early literacy initiative that promotes the importance of reading with young children from birth to five years of age. *Let's Read* is an evidence-based *early childhood literacy initiative* developed by the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute's Centre for Community Child Health in partnership with The Smith Family to improve and

measure literacy outcomes by encouraging parents to read with pre-school-aged children (0-5) years.

Inala to Goodna Let's Read developed a flexible delivery model to promote the importance of early literacy to Family Day Care Schemes. This model was developed in response to the needs of the organisations, their carers and families, thereby focusing on ownership by the communities involved. The model includes a number of components, thus messages about early literacy are received over time and across a number of different settings tailored to the needs of each group of carers. The Family Day Care Schemes have been provided with and can continue to access an array of literacy resources and literacy related information. The relationship with the service is ongoing, thereby assisting in the sustainability of the *Let's Read* program.

As a result of these sessions and the positive feedback received the project is continually developing resources and adding to the pool of literacy resources it has available. The resources will be showcased at future workshops and will feature in the *Early Childhood Educator* resource that is being developed in 2008 as part of the project. The outcomes from the *Let's Read* activity are mostly anecdotal. They include differences in the number of families accessing library services and an increase in libraries in day care settings.

Activities to help with school readiness

As school readiness incorporates the physical as well as the cognitive, social and emotional domains, it is important to support child and family health and safety. Communities can offer programs for children to learn about health and safety. Inala to Goodna *CfC's Building a Child Safe Community,* sponsored by Mission Australia and collaborative partners, held a *Building a Child Safe Community Launch.* This involved close collaboration between *CfC*, Elorac Place, NAPCAN, Neighbourhood watch, C&K Child Care and major state services for example; Qld Rail, Qld Transport, Qld Fire,

Ambulance and Police, Qld Oral Health as well as early childhood services. Each service set up a safety station and education site which children and parents visited together. The focus of the launch was SAFETY and encouraging children to develop and maintain protective behaviours. This included how to look after their bodies in relation to health, hygiene and nutrition, how to cross a road safely and how to be responsible around trains roads. The services also provided education for parents and children in relation to emergency procedures, who to call and the importance of knowing how to call triple zero '000'.

Each child was given a safety passport that was stamped at each safety station and education site. When their passports were full the child received a 'Junior Safety Ambassador Certificate'. All the children were given a snack pack and bag to collect their goodies from each Safety Station.

Over 250 children 0-5 and 100 parents/cares from the local community and region attended the day as well as students and teachers from Carole Park School Preps and C&K Child Care. A number of fathers attended as the environment was conducive to family fun activities.

Programs outside of Communities for Children Initiative for ready communities and services

There are a number of programs outside of the *CfC* Initiative that assess community needs, help communities make decisions about programming, promote awareness of issues relevant to school readiness, and even provide school readiness activities.

Wollongong Transition to School Network is an example of a ready communities project [22]. This community network consists of local early childhood services, teachers from state and Catholic schools, Wollongong City Council, Illawarra Children's Services, Families NSW, NSW TAFE. Begun in 2003, the network talked about community issues in school readiness and how they could be addressed within the community. They produced a

brochure about starting school and held activities such as a starting school picnic. A project officer was appointed who researched the area, liaised with schools, services, playgroups and families, and organized community events. Events included *Parents Expos*, a *Transition to School* website, a *Voices of Children* project (involving children in planning, implementation and evaluation of transition programs), and a competition to design a network mascot.

In the state of Manitoba, Canada *Parent-Child Coalitions* are groups of individuals and organizations within a geographic boundary who work together to support the needs of children and families in their region. "This approach promotes and supports community-based programs and activities for children and families. The *Parent-Child Coalitions* support existing activities and initiate activities that reflect each community's diversity and unique needs" [14]. The success of the program is demonstrated by the formation of 26 *Parent-Child Coalitions* province-wide: 23 regional coalitions (11 regions outside Winnipeg and 12 community areas within Winnipeg) and 3 cultural organizations. Additionally, a number of family resource centres across the province receive parent-child funding under this initiative. The parent-child centred approach includes community-based initiatives offering programs that provide support and education to families with young children.

In Manitoba, *Early Development Index* (*EDI*) reports are developed for the 26 *Parent-Child Coalitions*. "For these coalition reports, the *EDI* results are mapped by where children live – rural municipality or city neighbourhood – and can be used by coalitions to address the strengths and needs of individual communities" [23]. Access to this information "will help communities make informed decisions about how to support the development of their children, so that every child is able to fully benefit from their first school experience" [24:5].

An integrated approach where community members and services work together to collaborate with children and families to deliver quality programs and services can have a very positive impact on school

readiness. Starting school can be a positive and exciting experience "when communities work together and when children realize that they have the support of groups within their respective communities," [4:4]. This model has been adopted by the *CfC Initiative* supported by research evidence and the *Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)*.

READY SCHOOLS

After Emma had been in formal schooling for a few weeks, her Kindergarten (*see p42) teachers came to visit:

"I gave them a big cuddle … I was thinking about them and then they just came … I was doing the work [about] what I did on the weekend and they walked in. They said 'How are you going?' I said 'Yes' [going good] … They said hello to my friends…Then they went. I felt very good because I missed them."

Vivienne, her mother added:

"Kindy teachers planned to visit every child in school. We had to sign a permission form. The first I heard about it was when Emma came home and she was so excited that they had come to see her."

Emma's positive reaction to the visit by her Kindy teacher suggests that she had made a successful transition to school. Her mother feels this positive attitude was in part due to the connection between Emma's prior – to – school experience and the new school environment.

Schools have an important role to play in the readiness process [23]. In some ways, they become like a hub, where partners in the readiness process can come together to work on interrelated programs to enhance readiness. Principals and Junior School staff in particular can model best practice for all partners. The " … administration in a student-ready school, envisions the purposes of school from a hopeful perspective of students' abilities, backgrounds, and contributions" [16:285].

But all schools are different and have different expectations about children's readiness. "The same child, with the same strengths and needs,

can be considered ready in one school and not ready in another school. It is the school's responsibility to educate all children who are old enough to legally attend school, regardless of their skills" [24:1].

PROGRAMS FOR READY SCHOOLS

There are at least four ways in which schools can become ready: in their practices and pedagogy; in the roles of teachers; in home/school relationships; and in school relationships with early childhood care and education providers.

School Practices and Pedagogy

"The Kindergarten had information nights at all of the schools about Prep. Some parents went to more than one to help them make the decision about where to send their children. This didn't happen with my two previous children." (Vivienne, Emma's mother).

Information nights, school tours for preschoolers and family events are some ways that schools can contribute to readiness. These events can and do offer children and their families opportunities to understand and participate in the school community before the child enters formal schooling. Once or before the child is attending formal schooling buddy systems with older children, morning teas to welcome new families, school fetes, etc., can help children and families feel welcome and valued within the school community. Timetabling can include rest time for young children, as children can become tired from long days at school [16].

A key issue is that early childhood educators need to implement and advocate for play based learning for young children in the first years of school.

> *"Emma actually said to me the other day, 'I don't want to go to school' and I said 'why not? 'She replied 'Because you have to draw things' I was surprised I said ' … because you like drawing.' Emma said 'I do like drawing. But I like drawing what I want to draw, not what I'm being told to draw … I had to draw flowers and I didn't feel like drawing flowers'."*
>
> *"And I thought in a lot of ways that's what school is. She's always been able to be quite flexible. In Kindy they are a lot more able to express themselves and follow their own creativity. If you don't feel like participating in the cutting and pasting activity, you don't have to. Emma has got the message that you have to do certain things … Kids know they have to do certain things (brushing teeth, going to bed) but maybe they consider that some things are their domain, like drawing and colouring-in and play-based things seem to be their world and it's not usual that they are controlled in that world."* (Vivienne, Emma's mother).

In a 2003 study of 100 children in their first year of school, Potter & Briggs reported that one third of their sample didn't like school much; mainly because of the 'work' they were given. " … 'Work' to the children was typically what the teacher tells you to do even through you're not interested; what you have to do when you'd rather be doing something else; the stuff that's boring; when you can't choose and you have to do it" [25:46]. They also disliked teachers raising their voices, unfair punishment and humiliation. What children liked about school was choices, playing with friends, teacher assistance and teacher praise. "Learning in a student-ready school is about personal growth rather than meeting external standards" [26:283]. The authors advocate for an Inquiry (play-based) curriculum that reflects students' interests and abilities.

Stipek in [12] suggests that there should be a focus on creating learning opportunities for children of diverse skills. This shifts the responsibility back to the school and what is known of children's learning, so that curricula can extend, rather than limit children. Dunlop recommends schools look at quality and style of teacher interactions with children and school curricula. "If we have a spectrum of age, ability, experience, motivation, need and

interest, should we not also have a spectrum in the curriculum we offer?" [17].

Yeo and Clarke support the model of a buddy system to ensure that children feel supported by their peers as they commence formal schooling. They also say that teachers should be kind and supportive. Children need to be "given room to make mistakes and to understand that learning from mistakes is part of the learning process." Schools must create safe learning environments for all children and be sensitive to the socio-emotional as well as the physical adjustments of starting school. "Children have the right to start school confident that they can learn and to do so joyfully" [27:7].

Currie advocates for early childhood programs that have a health component to their educational program, as children in these programs are more likely to have benefited from medical checks and health services. These programs "are regularly evaluated with respect to indicators such as the fraction of children who have received dental examinations, hearing and vision screenings, and immunizations" [28:130].

Physical development, including gross motor and fine motor skills, is an important component of school readiness. Community programs that work in with schools and other services to support perceptual motor development while scaffolding teachers, caregivers and parents in running these programs independently, support young children's school readiness.

Cairns South *CfC's Giggly Wigglys Happy Hearts*, sponsored by Mission Australia and Choice Australia Management, is a gross motor program developed to get children more actively involved in sport and physical activity, healthy habits and choices. "Our program provides an opportunity to assist children before entering school to improve on important perceptual motor skills for example balance, hand-eye, foot-eye coordination, strength, agility, working with others and listening to instructions to name a few. These additional benefits of physical activity for children are a focus for us to assist in the development of cognitive and motor skills," says Kellie Wilkins, program coordinator. Based on the *Capon Perceptual Motor Program*,

Giggly Wiggly Happy Hearts incorporates aspects of physical activity that can assist a child to function more successfully as a student through the development of skills and learning abilities. Staff have taken invaluable experience of delivering this program in a primary school setting and incorporated aspects of Capon's program into their activities within five Community Day Cares, enabling them to work with parents as well as children. They also run after school activities in local park areas. Feedback from parents has been encouraging with remarks about their children's improved confidence and willingness to participate with others.

Life long participation in regular physical activity is beneficial, if not critical to health and well-being. During childhood it is vital to instil the habit of appropriate levels of participation in physical activity. The World Health Organisation states evidence suggests an active child will more often than not grow to be an active adult [29].

Two other Cairns South *CfC Initiative* activities, *Butterfly Wings* and *Play for Learning and Fun* locate their programs on school grounds. Although their primary targets are parents and children, the location and liaison with schools works toward a seamless transition to school. Children and families become familiar with the school grounds. classroom and administration spaces and school students and staff.

Cairns South *Butterfly Wings* facilitators are early childhood teachers from the school who are released to deliver the program for a half day per week. They provide a link for children making the transition from the program to school. David Zarb, *CfC*, The Smith Family Kwinana and Mirrabooka (Western Australia) spoke on the Webinar about the *BluEarth* program, where mentors in physical education work with schools and child care centres to develop physical activities that can be sustained by educators once again implanting the practice of physical activity.

Roles of Teachers

Teachers, both in prior to school and formal schooling, have a large role to play in the readiness process. They need to be "cognizant of the significant

role that early childhood educators play in young children's lives and the far-reaching effects that education can have" [30:246]. "School readiness is complex and diverse: readiness of a teacher to provide for the learning needs of a child as they arrive in Year 1. All children are learners and readiness is initiated when a space is created for a child to begin/ continue/ expand innate readiness to be a learner" (Katrina, in Sorin [31]).

> *"Kindy teachers are partners in transition – they also should be aware of what is required to help children get ready for school. ... Last year Kindy teachers prepared children. I think it makes a difference when the Kindy teacher is aware of what actually happens in the school environment. They made more of an effort on that transition."* (Vivienne, Emma's mother).

"Student-ready teachers need to be curious about students, their lives, their homes and their ideas … value students as a source of insight into the world, with their own set of valuable experiences that can be used to enrich the learning process" [26: 282]. Teachers need to get to know their students, their understandings, ideas and interests. "By taking an active interest in who students are and what they bring to the learning community, teachers may help students develop their own voice and ownership in the learning process [26: 283]. They must have a commitment to working with young children and a desire to provide the best possible program for them [32].

To be student-ready teachers need to "consider their beliefs about learning and development and how these might translate into expectations about readiness; review school readiness programmes in the light of beliefs, understandings and expectations of children" [8: 84 – 85].

Broadmeadows, Victoria *CfC* facilitates improved transition to school through encouraging preschool and school teachers to meet over the year to plan together and share resources and information and get to know each other as partners in the readiness process.

This process is led by Hume City Council and other community based preschools, working together with Primary schools through an *Early Years Partnership*. A format for children's portfolios has been developed where

portfolios are passed on from preschool to school, through parents. Teachers jointly attend forums and professional development workshops to continue their dialogue. Where schools and preschools are co-located next to each other, special gates have been built to facilitate closer contact and regular visits by preschoolers to school and school students to preschool. Community engagement events and performances have been jointly planned for the neighbourhood by both the school and preschool staff.

Home/School Relationships

Not only are families the first and most important teachers of their children, but the context of children's lives plays an important part in the success of their school experiences. "Children who find school unfamiliar and unrelated to their home contexts tend to experience difficulty, confusion, and anxiety during the transition" [4:4]. Conversely, children whose parents are involved with the school often perform better academically [12].

It is not just the child but the whole family that should have a positive relationship with the school [17]. "When families feel connected to the school and valued by those at school, they are generally supportive and willing to be engaged" [12:15]. Dockett and Perry advocate for genuine collaboration between the school and the home, to help families to feel part of the school community. Home and school links are particularly helpful for indigenous children, who can experience anxiety and confusion upon entering school. Support for culture and actively engaging indigenous learners is important, as well as the presence of indigenous school staff and strong links with the community [12]. Penman [32:46-47) in his literature review of The 'growing up' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children for *footprints in time* the longitudinal study of Indigenous children describes the importance of indigenous children acquiring their first language(s) and cultural and linguistic practices prior to entering the 'schooling culture' of a Western style school.

Jodi Warner, Department of Education & Training, a *CfC* Fairfield, NSW community partner, described their *Little Learners Program*, where six months before entry to formal schooling children begin to attend school for two hours a week. "This is a school readiness program that supports children emotionally, socially and academically for school. Their parents, who accompany them, are offered speakers in nutrition, helping your child with reading, oral hygiene, TAFE English courses, and first aid training." The *Little Learner* teacher is then able to visit children in early childhood settings and pass on exceptional information to Kindergarten classroom teachers. Children and families become accustomed to school life and routines and are ready to learn day one, term one.

In 2007, 20 families attended *Little Learners*. Their relationship with the school prior to formal schooling has made a difference to their school readiness, says Warner. The program is being offered again this year to support transition and orientation programs across the five schools we work with.

Dads and Kids Night is also sponsored by *CfC* Fairfield. Fathers and children come to school for two hours after school each term. In the first hour, parents and children participate in physical activities with facilitators from the BluEarth Institute. This supports the notion of fun through non-competitive activities where families simply enjoy playing together. They then break for a shared meal where new friendships and supports are formed between families.

The second hour offers fathers parenting education, from Uniting Care Burnside. Fathers discuss issues around parenting today in our local community, ways of becoming involved with school and ideas to use at home with their children. In this hour children continue play activities with teachers (many of them bilingual) who are seen in a fun, participatory environment. This program is completely voluntary and has reached up to 200 families.

From this activity, *CfC* staff have noticed more fathers picking up and dropping off children, becoming parent helpers in the classroom and

playgroup and doing work around the school such as electrical and gardening.

School relationships with early childhood care and education providers

Children's voices in Dockett and Perry's research indicated that they expected formal schooling to be different from prior to school learning. They were aware that there would be no rest periods; they would have to do homework, make new friends, abide by class rules or suffer consequences and exhibit manners. The children suggested that teachers in prior to school settings should teach them about these things. "Early childhood educators in school and prior-to-school settings can help make the transition positive if they listen to children, take their concerns seriously, and consider the experience from a child's perspective" [33:5].

According to Dunlop [17] schools and preschools should participate in joint planning of transition activities and processes. She recommends consideration be made to the following key indicators of good transition programs between preschool and school:

- Knowledge of practice across sectors
- Understanding of ideological differences between sectors
- Content and use of curriculum and child records
- Nature and quality of classroom interaction
- Place of playful learning in preschool and primary education
- What constitutes progression in learning
- Development needs of staff and joint staff training
- Role of management and leadership in making transition work a priority
- Teacher collaboration and planning across sectors
- Parent participation
- Children's contribution and sense of agency
- Policy to reflect each of these indicators

- Partnerships between schools and families, between schools and prior-to-school learning, and between schools and community services support the development of a solid foundation to school.

Cairns South *CfC* and the Cairns Catholic Education Services worked together in undertaking the *AEDI* in 2006-2007. From this working relationship came school strategies to assist in the transition to school, such as Parent Information Sessions to provide parents with school information and hints for transition from home and prior-to-school care to formal schooling and stronger school/prior to school links. Wendy Manners, Early Childhood Adviser for Cairns Catholic Education Services, reports that as a result, one of the local Kindergarten co-ordinators and another staff member visited the Prep (*see p42) classes, saying hello to ex-students and seeing how they've settled into formal schooling. They had a brief chat with classroom teachers regarding any issues or problems about which they could assist. "By preparing students for the transition to school, this co-ordinator ensures that she can give children a realistic picture of what Prep will be like. Whilst maintaining contact with the school, the children enjoy seeing her and telling her what they've been doing in Prep; and she enjoys seeing how grown up they have become", says Manners.

Ready schools means schools critically reflecting upon their practices and pedagogy; the roles teachers can play in the readiness process; and relationships: between the home and between the school and early childhood care and education providers.

The National Education Goals Panel's 10 keys for ready schools [16:2]:

- Help provide a seamless home/school transition
- Continuity between care, early childhood education and primary education
- Help children make sense of their world
- Be committed to every child's success
- Be committed to every teacher's success

- Use strategies that have been shown to improve achievement
- Change practices that aren't working
- Serve children in communities
- Take responsibility for results
- Have strong leadership.

Armadale, Western Australia's *CfC's* programs *Communication Capers* and *Preparing the Path* are sponsored by Communicare and Therapy Focus.

Communication Capers, a program aimed to improve oral language and literacy, operates in selected Kindergartens and Pre-primary classes selected based on *AEDI* results. Speech therapists work with teachers, providing professional development training, resources and demonstrations about working on oral language development. Pre and post test scores have been collected and the program has demonstrated an improvement in the oral language skills of all children whose teachers have participated in the program. Another facet of this program has been workshops for parents, with a home program provided about how to support language development in their children. This has also proved highly successful with up to 80% attendance at the workshops and a high rate of return of the completed home activities. "We would hope that this will translate into continued [parental] involvement with the schools, and build the confidence of parents", says Helen Burgess, *CfC* Armadale manager.

Staff from *Communication Capers* attend a variety of community events, providing parents with resources for developing oral language. Another outcome of the project has been better coordination of the referral process for accessing Community Health speech therapy services in Armadale. This has been achieved by working with the Speech Therapy services, discussing issues for childcare centres and schools, and providing training for childcare centres and schools on the referral process. "We are currently in the process of repeating the *AEDI* and it will be interesting to see if the concerted efforts of the all the services have been able to improve the results on the previous *AEDI*", says Burgess.

The *Preparing the Path* project was set up to support childcare centres and improve outcomes for children. In the past, Armadale child care staff has largely been young, inexperienced workers, some with no formal training. The project initially developed some modules that were delivered to childcare workers through workshops. This included a module on oral language and a self-paced learning manual. Training was well-attended, as it was provided locally.

"After evaluation we decided to deliver a series of *Early Brain Development* workshops for childcare workers, as feedback from centre directors indicated that the younger workers were not, understanding the importance of their roles in the development of children", says Burgess. This has resulted in a more engaged sector, with some centres bringing all their staff, and has led to an increase in attendance at other events.

Another aspect of *Preparing the Path* is the *Family Strategy*. This strategy focuses on aspects of child development and runs as a monthly event, where activities are supplied to families in the childcare centre, and the centre runs the activity for a month. Staff engage with the families and explain the materials and how to use them. Preliminary results indicate that this has also been highly successful and engages parents. The issue of transition to kindergarten and pre-primary for those that attend childcare centres has also been addressed, with meetings between schools and childcare centres. These meetings build relationships and attendees have collected a range of strategies for schools and childcare centres to work more collaboratively. A resource booklet was developed for childcare that could be used to talk about going to school. It contains information about the school environment, including photos of the school, the kindergarten environment and the teacher. Schools can also use the resource booklet with new enrolments and parents can use it with their children.

The *Let's Play School Program,* sponsored by Kilmany Uniting Care and *CfC* East Gippsland, is a program where state and independent schools in the Orbost cluster in far east Gippsland, Victoria offer a transition program collaboratively through opening up their schools in term three to all families

with young children, regardless of whether their children are intending to enrol at the school to commence their Preparatory year. "The schools offer a range of early childhood activities for young children and their families", says Sue Smith, *CfC* Project Worker.

Aiming for a seamless curriculum from playgroup to childcare to kindergarten and primary school, the *Orbost Schools as Hubs* program takes a collaborative approach, integrating services and aiming to break down barriers between service providers. They have established a local Early Years Reference Group to coordinate and plan activities and promote shared professional development opportunities. An *Emergent Curriculum Group* has also been established to build stronger professional links between childcare staff, kindergarten teachers and early years primary teachers.

READY FAMILIES

Family support is essential to school success [12, 14, 15]. "There are literally hundreds of activities that parents engage in either with or for their children" [33:140]. Helping children to prepare for school can include helping children to dress and toilet themselves, get their bags ready, tidy their rooms, help with the shopping, follow instructions and routines, and early literacy exposure. "Children who are exposed to more reading materials live in households where reading, both adult reading and parent-child shared reading, is more common" [34:142].

Parenting skills don't always come naturally, but they can be taught. They sit within culture, context and society. "Parents need to be empowered with courage to have a voice and be advocates for children's aspirations. They need to be empowered with resilience to keep raising their voices at school. Transition and readiness needs families and children to have respect and persistence for themselves" (Early Childhood Coordinator, Wanda). Researchers [34] found that parenting skills are improved by home and centre-based programs with a parenting component; programs that target families with behaviour problems; and family literacy programs.

> *"We probably prepare kids as a parent pretty well from birth. You start doing school. This is probably in my socio-economic culture – they've been read to, always had books, shown the conventions [of grammar], coloured in, 'done school' from a very young age. It may not be[the same] in other families, other cultures – books and things may not be as valuable as going out fishing that may not prepare them as well for school. When they get to school the kids who can write are the children who feel like they fit in because they can do the reading and writing. [In comparison], Kindy was very much free play and there was a certain amount of control but it was not as structured."* (Vivienne, Emma's mother).
>
> Emma said that from home, the skills she had learned that prepared her for formal schooling were to: *" … be careful with your stuff, keep your room tidy. My mum tells me to eat the crust of sandwiches. I do sometimes. My mum taught me how to write stuff like letters. I help her write some phone numbers."*

Reichman [35} sites the example of the *Medicaid* program as one that supports effective school readiness. *Medicaid* targets women's rather than children's health, as it increases prenatal care and thus birth weights among low socioeconomic status pregnant women. He advocates for policy makers and practitioners to focus on women's health rather than prenatal care. "It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to counteract a lifetime of disadvantage during the gestational period … Reducing rates of low birth weight would improve cognitive and behavioural outcomes among the entire population of school-aged children" [35:107].

PROGRAMS FOR READY FAMILIES

There are two distinct types of programs that help families build a solid foundation for school: ones in which parents participate with their children in modelled learning and others where parents are taught through theory

and practice how to play and do activities with their children to support cognitive, physical and socio-emotional development.

Parents Participate with their Children

Putting theory into practice reinforces learning. Learning parenting skills through participation can enhance skill building in the best possible context with children present and actively involved.

To build community capacity to support families and recognition of family strengths, Mission Australia and Playgroup Queensland have sponsored Cairns South *CfC*'s *Play for Learning and Fun*. This program not only prepares families for school but also empowers parents to be self-sufficient in providing valuable play-based learning with their children.

The *Play for Learning and Fun* Activity is a mobile, supported playgroup enabling families with children 0-5 years to participate in an early childhood experience that would not normally be accessed due to socio-economic or geographical issues. Playgroups are individualized to ensure each group learns what they choose for their children, themselves and their community. The playgroup facilitators work in conjunction with families to promote positive learning through play, offering information and resources to parents and children.

Based on early childhood education and early intervention, this activity is designed to ensure that socially/physically isolated children and parents/carers have access to stimulating activities and increase their social development in safe and supportive environments. Children gain skills while playing and having fun with their parent/carer. Skills such as motor (fine & gross), cognitive, sensory, imaginative, language and literacy, social and communication are some of these. It also reduces the stress of families when their children first attend formal schooling and separation anxiety because the child learns to become independent with regular attendance at playgroup. Often playgroups are held on school grounds, so that a connection to school is established at an early age.

When the playgroup is established, parents/carers transition to take on the responsibility of running the playgroup, while learning new skills that then empower parents as members of the broader community.

Judith Gray, *CfC*, Broadmeadows, spoke on the ARACY Webinar associated with this topic on 30th April 2008 about five playgroups that are located in primary schools in her area. "These popular playgroups are facilitated by local parents recruited and trained as playgroup facilitators. Due to their success, some schools are running these playgroups two to three days per week." These groups highlight the importance of children's social and emotional development, oral language development and nutrition as readiness skills. For parents they offer an important point of social connection and welcome into the school environment.

Another area in which families become school ready through parent and child participation is the area of literacy development. While reading to children is an important way of encouraging literacy development, songs, rhymes, stories and chants also help strengthen the parent-child bond while supporting early literacy learning.

Cairns South *CfC*'s *Butterfly Wings* activity, sponsored by Mission Australia, Family Day Care Cairns South and Southern Parents Empowering Early Development (SPEED) aims to develop language and communication skills through parent and child participation in their programs. Children between the ages of 0 and 5 years accompany their parents to a *Butterfly Wings* room in a school, where early childhood trained facilitators deliver a program based on early brain development theory [6] and the belief that parents are the most important teachers a child will ever have. While many parents still believe that all their children's important learning begins at school, this program teaches something quite different.

Parents and children participate in rhymes, songs and movement activities to reinforce language and literacy development. As the program is delivered, the school principal calls in to chat to parents, as both parents and children become familiar with school routines. Coming into a school is 'normalised' and families are welcomed. The program starts just after

'parade' and finishes just as the children are having their lunch recess familiarising the families with school routines.

A mother of two children, aged 2 and 3 said: "The children love coming [to *Butterfly Wings*] and now make up words or just sing songs wherever they are. Teaching the older siblings makes it family fun time-including telling stories without having to read them."

Health, activity and nutrition are important ways to develop ready families. Inala to Goodna *CfC's Community Nutrition Initiative – Inala Community Gardens*, sponsored by Mission Australia and Inala Community House assists parents and children to learn about gardening, health and nutrition through the building of a community garden.

The *Inala Community Gardens* activity takes the gardens to the people. The strategy involves conducting a range of activities at community events or natural gatherings such as playgroups and early childhood settings. This would include group planting activities with children and parents and/or focus on nutrition and healthy eating with education sessions such as "where does food come from". The use of a mobile community garden activity has significantly increased numbers of families and children engaging. In the last reporting period over 1,000 children, parents/carers had been engaged utilising this method.

A mobile community garden and activities takes advantage of opportunities to actively engage parents and their children in a community. The community garden has become a vehicle to introduce and educate parents and children to the benefits of growing and eating healthy foods. One parent has created her own vegetable patch at home as her daughter has become an avid gardener since participating in the *Family Fun Day Spring Blitz* and the *Kids Cooking*. This child has been involved in planting, picking produce from the garden, watering and general lessons through observations and asking questions.

Another Inala to Goodna *CfC* program, sponsored by Mission Australia and Spiritus, is the *Integrated Parent Education Initiative (IPEI)*. Recognising the

importance of socio-emotional development and its connection with intellectual development as preparation for school and during the school years, this program is a partnership that commenced with the *Active Children Thrive Project*, and continued as a *Calm Kids Yoga* program. Each week for one semester, *Calm Kids Yoga* has been running for parents and their children 2 - 5 years of age. There is a core group of participants who attend every week. One particular child, with 2 siblings and a parent are amongst this core group. Ewan is 4 years of age, has a lot of conflict in his home life and his general behaviour is often disruptive; abusive and occasionally unmanageable. Continuity, perseverance and persistence from; the instructor, Ewan's parent and the other participants, plus familiar place; consistent rules and boundaries, have all supported Ewan to over time positively be part of a group; take on responsibility and play appropriately with his peers. The positive changes in Ewan's behaviour, within the context of *Calm Kids Yoga* classes, has filtered out to his play group, Child Care Centre and interactions with his siblings. Ewan can focus on a task for a longer period of time; follow directions better and generally is a much happier child. His parent feels more supportive and supported; more able to 'manage'; and more connected to the community.

Cairns South *CfC*'s *Playing Mother* activity, sponsored by Mission Australia and Choice Management, uses theatre as a tool to strengthen parenting awareness and skills of the target group, young mothers. *Playing Mother* develops real stories from parents in the Cairns South area into scripts input into the *Mothers in the Spotlight* resource book. These scripts are then dramatised and presented back to young mothers, new mothers and potential mothers in the community. *Mothers in the Spotlight* is a book of 13 plays developed from the stories, with associated drama activities and photographs of parents and children. Avril Duck, *Playing Mother* coordinator, relates this program to school readiness in a number of ways. She says that facilitators and teachers take the resource to clients, students and/or participants who interact with the experiences presented in the play, opening up dialogue about parenting. New and potential mothers become more connected with other parents and more aware of parenting

language, services and information. They become more confident in their parenting skills, so children from birth to 5 years benefit from better parenting and will become healthier, happier, safer and more school ready.

Parents' Programs

Cairns South *CfC's Positive and Protective* program, sponsored by Mission Australia and Family Planning Queensland, assists families and childcare staff in preparing children for school by providing them with information that promotes healthy sexuality and reinforces self protection skills in early childhood. Through a range of workshops and the provision of resources, parents, carers and staff of early childhood centres can develop an understanding of: the stages of sexual development children go through in their early years; how to recognise and respond to normal and inappropriate sexual behaviours; how to communicate with children about sexuality; and how to teach children self protection strategies. This includes identifying feelings, knowing the correct names for private body parts, identifying different types of touch and rules about touch that help children to be safe, a strategy of *NO, GO, TELL* to teach children when they feel unsafe, and identifying adults who children can go to for help when they need it. Providing adults with such skills and knowledge helps them to support children's healthy sexual development and self-protection, some of the skills, knowledge and strategies that prepares for transition to school.

David Zarb, The Smith Family *CfC* WA Services, noted that they have 11 school-based programs aimed at improving parents' attitudes toward school and breaking down home/school barriers.

Other examples go beyond the scope of the *CfC Initiative*. For instance Mission Australia's *Pathways to Prevention Program* is "a community-based initiative with a range of services in a single disadvantaged community in Queensland" [2:18]. The program targets schools, preschools and the community and aims to improve parenting and networking skills and for children to make a positive transition to school. A variety of family support activities are offered through the *Family Independence Program,* such as

parent support groups, playgroups, chid and youth programs and the *Preschool Intervention Program* targets communication and social skills in young children.

READY CHILDREN

Ready children have the resilience to overcome any barriers that prevent them from maximal learning and full participation in the school environment. They are not weighed down by health, development, social, emotional and cognitive issues that restrict their participation in the school environment.

> Emma reported that she knew she was ready for formal schooling because: "*My mum told me I was ready … from the calendar … You need to be old enough, and you need a lunch box, shoes, socks, pencils. You have to ask to go to the toilet; you have to say 'may I?' At Kindy, you didn't have to ask. You need to learn to draw good pictures.*"

Potter & Briggs [25] suggest that to please their teacher, children in their first year of formal schooling said they had to be well behaved, do good work and follow class rules.

"Some skills and abilities make the transition to school easier for all concerned" [8:13]. The *AEDI* describes physical health and wellbeing in terms of attendance at school, being dressed appropriately, and being healthy: well-rested, well-fed and energised. It includes independent toileting, established hand preference, and good fine and gross motor coordination [35]. Generally, children become school ready physically, cognitively and socio-emotionally. Physically they get older and larger, and must put on and wear a uniform and shoes. Independent toileting skills are considered essential. Children must stay in school and awake for full days, eating a packed lunch at set times, and have the agility to engage in physical activities set by the school. Children with special education needs and physical disabilities may find these expectations challenging. They may require additional assistance to participate in the school environment and

the school may have to make additional provisions to accommodate their needs.

In evaluating school readiness teachers administering the *AEDI* are asked to rate children's effective use of English, there are also a number of specific items that relate to cognitive development. They include story telling, taking part in imaginative play, articulating clearly, communicating needs, understanding what is being said and listening ability. Pre-reading skills include interest in books, identifying letters, sounds and rhymes, reading simple words and participating in group reading activities. Pre-writing skills include trying writing materials, left to right progression, and writing names, simple words and simple sentences. Early numeracy skills are also assessed [36].

"Dispositions, values, feelings, attitudes, and understandings are equally as important as skills and knowledge" [8:3]. Socio-emotional issues are considered of utmost importance to school readiness by many. Socially, children need to be able to separate from parents, develop friendships and feel happy about going to school. The *AEDI* determines social and emotional readiness in terms of getting along with and respecting others, taking responsibility for actions, fitting in with school routines and procedures, empathy towards others, and personal behaviours [32 and 35].

PROGRAMS FOR READY CHILDREN

A number of *CfC* programs help children become ready for school, such as: *Building a Child Safe Community; Giggly Wiggly Happy Hearts; Play for Learning and Fun; Butterfly Wings,* and the *Inala Community Gardens.*

David Zarb, Manager *CfC*, The Smith Family WA, Kwinana and Mirrabooka sites described *Kwinana Early Years Services* program. A team of experts, including psychologists, social workers, parent educators and teachers take a team-based approach to school readiness, targeting 10 families at a time in an intensive model. They conduct playgroups and visit parents, often using a developmental checklist to identify issues of concern to parents and children, such as autism and school access.

As with Ready Schools there are also a number of programs beyond the scope of the *CfC Initiative* that help children become school ready. *Children and Buddies* is an example from Stirling in Scotland described by Dockett and Perry [3] where Year 5 students meet prospective kindergarteners at orientation, show them around and play with them in the playground.

Countdown to Kindergarten program Boston, MA, in [3] features a series of coordinated visits to local schools, info sessions and resources available to families in the year before kindergarten.

Yeo et al [27] reported on an *Orientation Program* in Singapore to help children get ready for school. Six weeks before school began, children attended school with their parents. Parents were given a briefing about school rules and regulations and children met their future teachers and talked about school routines and procedures, visited their classrooms and participated in drawing, writing and story activities. When they began school they were paired with a Year 5 'buddy' who 'chaperoned' them during recess. When interviewed five months later, the Year 1 children overall reported a positive transition to school, although they saw school as a serious place where learning overruled play, as they became familiar with school rules, learned to follow directions and adopted school behaviours.

Table 1 (commencing p50) highlights some of the programs available through the *CfC* Initiative and other Australian and international programs that support families and children in developing a solid foundation for school.

CONCLUSION

Children are all different in what they come to school with and what they need of school and the community. Factors such as: socioeconomic status, ability/disability, culture, language and early experiences affect how children will progress in the formal learning environment. The period before children enter the formal learning environment – the pre-natal time, then between birth and five or six years of age – is a time when a difference can be made. Partnerships that allow an active role and include children, parents, families, teachers prior to school and formal schooling, school personnel, community and/or service providers can be established to take positive steps toward school readiness. As McCain, Mustard and Shanker say, "Linking the activities provided by the partners and developing a common pedagogical approach provides a consistent learning and care environment for children and more accessible entry for parents. A joint commitment to the application of effective practices enhances quality, and therefore, children's developmental opportunities" [10:160].

This paper has examined school readiness, revisited the *Readiness Equation* [9] and suggested changes to the equation so that children's voices are given the weight they deserve as active participants in learning and development. Based on the rewritten equation, it has examined what ready communities and services, ready schools, ready families and ready children look like in terms of programs and processes at each level, with links to other levels/partnerships in the process. Finally it has given examples of readiness programs and processes, through the *CfC Initiative*, nationally, and internationally that have impacted on school readiness. These examples are in no way exhaustive – there are many more programs and processes to be added and this shared knowledge should inspire all of us to move forward with integrated processes and programs that enhance school readiness for all children and families.

While being aware of individual needs, this overview has highlighted a number of models for practices of communities, teachers, families and children to provide for a solid foundation for school. It is important to

recognise that readiness does not happen in the week or month prior to school entry. It is an ongoing process from pre-birth through the early years of life.

Strong, positive relationships between partners in the readiness process; are essential. Effective communication between partners includes knowledge of each other's practices. Continuity of care, prior to school and school education, and continuity between the culture of the home and the culture of the school support the partnerships. Finally recognition of the child as an active agent in the process contributes a solid foundation leading to successful school entry. Our suggested readiness equation is:

> **Ready Communities and Services + Ready Schools + Ready Families + Ready Children = Readiness for learning and development in the school years**

Partners need to work together to develop practical, easy to follow plans for school readiness. Once plans are implemented in practice, they need to be evaluated and re-developed based on evidence and in response to changing needs. Many successful programs are planned by and/or target more than one partner in the readiness equation. Many are also located on partners' grounds or in community hubs.

Finally, there must be a commitment to success for every child, and their family, every teacher and school, and every service and community. All partners must feel able to contribute, valued for their contributions, and an important player in the readiness process. As Wanda an Early Childhood Coordinator related: "Readiness needs to be underpinned by relationships, connectedness, belonging. It needs to honour parents and families, parents and children need to trust the school, the journey and the destination." Readiness means having a positive attitude towards school with strong links between families and schools during and after the transition phase. School - ready students will find school a place of learning, growth and joy.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN AUSTRALIAN STATES FOR THE YEAR PRIOR TO AND FOR SCHOOL ENTRY

* The glossary below lists the terms used for the year before formal schooling and the first year of formal schooling in each Australian state.

This glossary is included in response to a request from Webinar participants.

State or Territory	Year before formal schooling	First Year of formal schooling (non-compulsory in all states)
Australian Capital Territory	Preschool	Kindergarten - Kindy
New South Wales	Preschool	Kindergarten - Kindy
Northern Territory	Kindergarten - Kindy	Transition
Queensland	Preschool, Kindergarten -Kindy Pre - Prep	Preparatory - Prep
South Australia	Preschool	Reception
Tasmania	Kindergarten - Kindy	Preparatory - Prep
Victoria	Kindergarten - Kindy, Preschool	Preparatory - Prep
Western Australia	Kindergarten - Kindy	Pre-Primary

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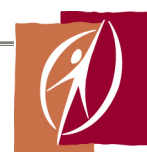
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Table 1. Readiness Programs and Activities

The programs and activities described in the paper are included in this table. This list is by no means exhaustive there are many other programs that provide building blocks in providing children with a solid foundation for school.

Name	Sponsor	Target Group	Description
Building a Child Safe Community Inala to Goodna *CfC*	Mission Australia and collaborative partners	Inala/Goodna Community	This project focuses on educating parents and children about safety, emergency procedures, protective behaviours, health, hygiene and nutrition.
Butterfly Wings Cairns South *CfC*	Mission Australia and Family Day Care South Cairns/SPEED (Southern Parents Empowering Early Development)	0-2 and 3-5 years and parents in the southern corridor of Cairns	Free Early Intervention and Early Literacy program focusing on traditional and contemporary rhymes and songs. A fun interactive, capacity building Parenting Education program to help parents develop literacy skills, contemporary early years' brain and child development knowledge and to develop a repertoire of rhymes, songs and stories to share with family members.

Name	Sponsor	Target Group	Description
Communication Capers Armadale WA *CfC*	Communicare Inc and Therapy Focus	Children 0-6	Aimed at improved oral language and literacy, a targeted program delivered in selected Kindergartens and Pre-primary classes selected on the basis of *AEDI* results. Speech therapists work with teachers, providing professional development training, resources and demonstrations about oral language development. Also workshops with parents.
Community Nutrition Initiative – Inala Community Gardens Inala to Goodna *CfC*	Mission Australia and Inala Community House	Inala/Goodna Community	This project provides opportunities to educate people about the garden and encourages successful engagement across the community.
Culture of Education Mt Isa and *CfC*	Centacare, Mt Isa and Healy Public School	Yallambee Aboriginal Community	Yallambee has 10 cottages managed by Dept of Housing. *CfC* started getting children to school starting with 6 in 2007 and 26 in 2008. The program provides breakfast, clothing, books and transport. The activity is a holistic one that covers life skills and personal development of children d their families.
Dads and Kids Nights Fairfield NSW *CfC*	The Smith Family and the BluEarth Institute	Children 4-6	This is offered for two hours after school each term. The program supports non competitive sporting activities with fathers, mentors and children in the first hour and in the second hour fathers participate in discussions around issues around parenting in their local community while the children continue to play and participate in activities with teachers and leaders.

Name	Sponsor	Target Group	Description
Giggly Wigglys Happy Hearts Cairns South *CfC*	Mission Australia and Choice Australia Management	3-6 year old children & parents and guardians, child care workers in the southern corridor of Cairns and Yarrabah	The Activity is designed to engage young children to participate in pre-schooling sport and recreational activities that are designed to develop team work skills, hand and eye coordination, agility, balance and strength.
Integrated Parent Education Initiative Inala to Goodna *CfC*	Mission Australia and Spiritus	Children 2-5	Innovative programs for both parents and children exposing them to opportunities for skills building, self management techniques and strengthening parent/child relationships.
Kwinana Early Years Services Kwinana WA *CfC*	The Smith Family	Children 0-5	A team-based approach by professionals including psychologists, social workers, parent educators and teachers to school-readiness providing intensive support to 10 families at a time using a developmental checklist to identify issues of concern.
Lets Play School and *Orbost Schools as Hubs* East Gippsland Vic *CfC*	Kilmany Uniting Care and the Orbost Education Cluster	Children 3-6 and their parents	A transition program providing a range of early childhood activities in term three each year for all children enrolling in Preparatory Year whether or not they'll be attending that particular school in the coming year. Orbost *Schools as Hubs* has established a local Early Years reference group to coordinate and plan activities.

Name	Sponsor	Target Group	Description
Lets Read Inala to Goodna *CfC*	Mission Australia and C&K Child Care	Children 0-5 and their parents	The development and implementation of early literacy reading packs for delivery to families by community based professionals who have an existing relationship with families.
Little Learners Program Fairfield, NSW *CfC*	The Smith Family and NSW Department of Education and Training	Children 4-6	This is a school readiness program that supports children for six months prior to formal school entry through introductory sessions at the school for two hours per week. Parents accompany the children and are offered speakers in nutrition, helping the child with reading, oral hygiene, TAFE English courses, and first aid training. The teachers also visit the children in their early childhood settings.
Play for Learning and Fun; a supported mobile playgroup Cairns South *CfC*	Mission Australia and Playgroup Queensland	Cairns South including Babinda, and the Aboriginal Shire of Yarrabah	This enables families with children 0-5 years to participate in an early childhood experience that would normally not be accessed because of socio-economic or geographical issues. Parents/ carers take on the responsibility for running the playgroup while learning new skills that empower them in their local community.
Playing Mother Cairns South *CfC*	Mission Australia and Choice Australia Management	Future Parents, High School students, parents and guardians, in the southern corridor of Cairns and Yarrabah	This Activity uses theatre as a tool to strengthen parenting awareness and skills of the target group, young mothers, and future parents by developing real stories into scripts that have been collated into a resource '*Mothers in the Spotlight'*. The scripts have been dramatised and supported with teachers/leaders notes for classroom or group use.

Name	Sponsor	Target Group	Description
Preparing the Path Armadale WA *CfC*	Communicare Inc Technical and Further Education	Children 0-8	Supporting child care staff through professional development modules including oral language development and early brain development workshops. Also a family strategy providing monthly workshops for parents of children in care.
Teachers Network Hume/Broadmeadows Vic *CfC*	Uniting Care, Dianella Community Health Inc and Orana Family Services and Hume City Council	Early Childhood Teachers Children 0-8	Joint planning, sharing resources and information and children's portfolios.
Wollongong Transitions to School Network Illawarra Transitions to Schools Project	*Families NSW,* NSW Government Initiative	Children 0-8	Has an early intervention focus based on research that has clearly shown the importance of the early years for the future development of children. One of the key strategies in *Families NSW* formerly *Families First* is what has become known as Universal Transition to School.
EPPE – Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project	Department for Education and Skills, Institute of Education, University of London	Children aged 3-7 years	This longitudinal project investigated the effects of pre-school education and care on development for 3000 children aged 3-7 years old.

Name	Sponsor	Target Group	Description
Ontario Early Years	Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Canada	Children from the prenatal period to age six, and their parents	The objectives of the *Ontario Early Years* project include: • to improve the health and well-being of children under six • to help parents in their important role • to provide equal access to early years information across the province • to help communities address the needs of their youngest children.
Sure Start Program	*Sure Start* Unit of the Children, Young People and Families Directorate, report to Department of Education and Skills and Department of Work and Pensions, UK	Families from pregnancy until their children are 14 (16 for special needs children)	*Sure Start* services bring together universal, free, early education and more and better childcare ensuring delivery of: • free education for all children aged 3-4 (12.5 hours of free *educare* support per week) • affordable and quality child care and after-school activities in all areas • children's centres and health and family support in disadvantaged areas.

Name	Sponsor	Target Group	Description
Voices of Children Project	*Families NSW a NSW Government Initiative with Wollongong City Council*	Prior to school and primary school age children	This project was a small investigation into the ways in which primary and prior-to-school children can be actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of transition to school programs. The project was run in four primary schools and some of their feeder prior-to-school settings following an expression interest process

APPENDIX 1. MEASURING SCHOOL READINESS

> This appendix discusses measurement tools used to indicate school readiness. They are categorised according to Meisels' (1999) constructs of school readiness. This provides a sense of perspective for the assessments.
>
> The material was retained as part of this paper at the request of the Communities for Children audience for the Webinar of 30 April 2008.

In 1999, Meisels [7] categorised school readiness into four constructs: *The Maturationist View*, The *Environmental View*, The *Social Constructivist View* and *The Interactionist View*. Beginning with the developmental domains, these constructs progress to adding environmental and social factors and other actors who participate in school readiness. Each construct will be reviewed in relation to how it appears in theory and measures of school readiness that could be used if the view were utilised.

Citing Shepard, Kagan & Wurtz, 1998, Maxwell and Clifford [16], say there are five purposes for school readiness assessments: to improve learning; to identify children with special needs; to evaluate programs; to monitor trends over time; and to use for high stakes accountability. However, measuring school readiness is a controversial issue. While assessments are meant to identify needs in children and support and evaluate programs [21] early childhood assessments have a "poor track record of readiness screeners" due to intra-individual differences in performance. Few measures of school readiness are valid and reliable [8 and 21] Critique of standardised tests includes that they are unnatural and better indicators would come from ecological testing, where children are assessed within their environment. Teacher input into assessment may not be accurate and complete and children's performance can differ dramatically from one assessment to the next [21]. With these concerns in mind, measurements can and are being used to give some indication of school readiness.

Measurement and the Maturationist View

The Maturationist View examines readiness in terms of biological and genetic factors. Based on the work of Arnold Gesell, children are viewed as following a predictable developmental trajectory. As their natural potential unfolds, children become "ready to learn when they are ready", [7:47] and evidence of school readiness is internal.

In support of this view, Noble, Tottenham and Casey (2005) note that readiness can now be assessed in terms of specific brain-based cognitive functions. For example, "the extreme stress of being placed in an orphanage leads to abnormal brain development and decreased cognitive functioning" [7:71]. However, children's brains remain plastic and can change and grow. Brain regions involved with reading are quite malleable and can be activated to change through phonics and other reading programs. These programs may be more effective depending on the brain development of the child.

Measures that could be used to determine readiness according to *The Maturationist View* include *Developmental Checklists* (Clancy, 2005), the *Gesell School Readiness Test* (Hains et al, 1980, in [8]) and medical checks.

But classifying children as ready for school based on biological/genetic factors alone is problematic. "Research shows that many children are misclassified as not ready. This perspective leads many educators and families to assume that young children will acquire knowledge naturally and automatically as they grow physically and become older" (Clancy, 2005:1). It implies that "the cause of any problem must lie with the individual, rather than the environment or those around the child" [8:70]. Dickens (2005:56) notes "there can be little doubt that genetic differences are an important determinant of academic achievement within racial and ethnic groups" and also stresses the influence of the environment in the early years in school readiness.

Measurement and the Environmental View

Meisels' second construct is *The Environmental View*. Based on Skinner's and Bandura's views, school readiness is indicated by behaviours and learning demonstrated by children (external evidence). This can include knowledge of colours, shapes, the alphabet, one's address, how to spell one's name and behaving in a polite and sociable way [7]. Skills are measured, but in isolation rather than in context.

Sorin [31] relates an anecdote from a colleague about school readiness that would fit under this category: "In some provinces of Russia, one measure of readiness was ability to follow the instruction to pull on the left ear with the right hand" [31]. In surveys of teachers and parents, Lewit and Baker (1995) in [12] found that teachers named physical health and nutrition as important school readiness factors, whereas parents named academic skills as most important. Both groups named social communication skills and enthusiasm as important characteristics in school readiness.

A tool that examines behaviours and learning of individual children to inform a population-based measure of development at school entry is the *Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)*. It is based on the *Early Development Instrument (EDI)* created in Ontario, Canada in 2000 as a result of the 1999 *Early Years Report* [10]. Modified in Australia in 2003/4, the *AEDI* lists five domains of readiness as components of children's learning and behaviour: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge. According to the index, physical health and wellbeing are assessed by school attendance, appropriate dress and being well-rested, well-fed and energised. This domain includes independent toileting, established hand preference, good fine and gross motor coordination [36].

The *AEDI* determines social and emotional readiness through behaviours such as getting along with and respecting others, taking responsibility for actions, fitting in with school routines and procedures, empathy towards

others, and personal behaviours. Language, cognitive development, communication skills and general knowledge are determined by children's effective use of English, including story telling, taking part in imaginative play, articulating clearly, communicating needs and understanding what is being said and listening. Pre-reading skills include interest in books, identifying letters, sounds and rhymes, reading simple words and participating in group reading activities. Pre-writing skills include trying writing materials, left to right progression, and writing name, simple words and simple sentences. Early numeracy skills are also assessed [36].

The National School Readiness Indicators [18 and 31] are another measure that looks at behaviour and learning. This also names five domains of the child, which indicate readiness. They are: physical wellbeing and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge.

There are several other measures of behaviour and learning, as measures of readiness according to *The Environmental View*. The *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test* (PPVT) is an individually administered measurement of hearing, vocabulary and verbal ability. The *Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence – Revised,* is an individually-administered test of general intellectual functioning for children from 3 to 7 years 3 months. Components can be analysed for learning patterns. Scores are converted into IQ scores with an average score of 100. Likewise the *Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale – 4th edition* is a measure of cognitive ability in verbal reasoning, abstract/visual reasoning, quantitative reasoning and short-term memory to determine an age score with the average score of 100 for each age group (Rock & Stennner, 2005).

Critique of measures that take an environmental perspective include that factors such as family income and home environment and the tests' racial or ethnic bias can influence scores (Rock & Stenner, 2005), that children can be categorised as 'ready' or 'not ready' without recognising the spectrum of readiness and other factors that influence readiness, and that children

can be misclassified [7 and 8]. They add that these tests do not focus on the potential to learn.

Measurement and the Social Constructivist View

Meisels' third construct of school readiness is *The Social Constructivist View*. Through this lens, school readiness is "embedded in the child's social and cultural context" [7:71]. Theorists such as Piaget, Montessori and Vygotsky promoted this view. Readiness is neither biological nor demonstrated by behaviours. Rather it is embedded in the social and cultural context, so the gaze shifts to the local community. "The beliefs, expectations, understandings and experiences of those in the school, and the community in which the school exists, largely determine definitions of readiness for that context. In other words, readiness means different things in different situations, and children could be 'ready' for one type of school experience but not another" [8:71].

Petriwskyj's (2005) study, based on a *Social Constructivist View* that the school must be ready for the child, found that it is important to develop teachers' pedagogy to support the school readiness of diverse learners, including socially marginalised and indigenous children who have little or no preschool experience.

The *HOME inventory* is an example of a measurement tool that may come from a *Social Constructivist View*. It has several items indicative of literacy in the child's environment: "child has access to at least 10 children's books; at least ten books are visible in the home; family buys and reads a daily newspaper; child has three or more books of his or her own" [34:142].

Measurement and the Interactionist View

Meisels' fourth construct, *The Interactionist View,* includes elements of the first three constructs but goes further. Within this construct, readiness is a relative term focusing on interactions between the child's characteristics and characteristics of the environment. Maxwell and Clifford [16] say: "School readiness, in the broadest sense, involves children, families, early

environments, schools and communities. Children are not innately ready or not ready for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before coming to school." Other people could include "school staff, including staff in prior-to-school settings … input from the broader community in which the school and families exist … [and] involvement of staff from across the school, such a school liaison officers, teachers from other grades, school office staff, the canteen manager, librarian, community nurse, school aides, Aboriginal Education Assistants" [33:13]. Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (2000,) in [33] note the importance of interactions and relationships in a positive start to school. "Starting school becomes a community issue and a community responsibility" [33:3]. The child's contributions to learning and to his/her environment are recognised.

Relationships and changes to relationships make a difference to transition. "Starting school is not just an experience for the individual child. Rather, it is a community experience, involving a wide range of people … the nature of relationships between and among children, families, peers, and early childhood educators has a significant impact on children's sense of belonging and acceptance within a school community". Dockett and Perry [8] recommend that educators and parents develop positive relationships with children, particularly as they move from prior to school to formal schooling.

The Interactionist View reflects Bronfenbrenner's ecological model [17] as a community approach to school readiness is implemented. Acknowledging that parents play a critical role in school readiness, *Healthy Child Manitoba* [14] note that "other family members and communities also play an important role. Safe and supportive neighbourhoods as well as access to quality early childhood programs are also linked to children's readiness for school."

Through this lens, information comes from many sources, such as teachers, families and children [16] and includes issues regarding how individual children are perceived as ready for school, how community resources
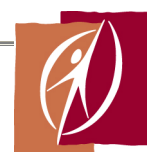
impact on transition programs and how children are screened for school readiness [4]. "Interactions need to be assessed over time, through strategies that involve children, parents and teachers making judgements about learning" [8:73]. All perspectives need to be taken into account.

The *Pathways Mapping Initiative* (2007) is an example of the *Interactionist View*. It places good health (healthy, wanted births and health development on track) with supportive social and cognitive environments (strong bonds with primary caretaker and supportive home; high quality child care and early education; and family connected to responsive networks and services); and safe, strong neighbourhoods (supportive neighbourhoods, family-friendly physical environments and responsive, effective schools). "Schools and communities need to be ready to accommodate the diverse needs and experiences of children and their families" (Murphey & Burns, 2002 in Weigel & Martin, 2006:2).

One setback to this view is that different players could have different ideas about readiness. "Any judgements about children's readiness, or otherwise, can involve different things for different people" [8:84]. However, this may be overridden by clear communication between players.

> *Relationships are vital to all humans when moving into and through environments. … A child must be resilient and be able to form relationships while knowing and acquiring skills. Their genes and family background impacts on their self-worth, as do the child's background and circumstance, in fact all the ways that a human can be* (Jon, Preparatory teacher, in [31]).

"The prime focus is on establishing a sense of community among the participants, a sense of belonging, acceptance, and adventure as children, parents, and educators form a partnership to promote the education and well being of young children" [33:13].

Because *The Interactionist View* looks at interactions between the characteristics of the child and the child's environment, measures that address interactions would fall into this category. For example, Sanders,

Turner, Wall, Waugh, and Tully (1997) used the *Mealtime Observation Schedule* to record interactions of children between the ages of 12 and 84 months during mealtimes. Interactions with peers are components of social development that contribute to school readiness. *The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (revised),* (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 1998, in [17]) can be used to compare transition environments (e.g. preschool and prep classes). Its measures include the physical environment in terms of space and furnishing but also interactions, personal care; language/ reasoning activities; programme structure; parents and staff.

Using more than one measure of readiness is not only possible but also recommended from an *Interactionist* perspective. For example, Winter, Zurcher, Hernandez and Yin (2007) used the *Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning – 3rd edition* (Mardell-Czudnowski & Goldenberg, 1998) to measure children's gross and fine motor development; basic concepts; language; and give an overall composite score to the child and the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised Edition (ECERS-R)* (Harms et al, 1998) to measure interactions and other features of a quality early childhood environment.

Each readiness tool is designed for a particular purpose, so the purpose of the assessment needs to be clear before a tool can be selected. Tools are usually designed based on a view of school readiness so views of readiness should be articulated before a tool is chosen [16] Appendix 2 (below) describes tools that can be used to measure school readiness based on Meisels' [7] constructs. It should be noted that most measurement tools require specialist training. For example, measures such as anecdotal documentation or basic physical checklists can be implemented by early childhood teachers who have been trained to do them. The *AEDI* requires input from qualified teachers of the first year of formal schooling. Other measures require registered psychologists or research professionals.
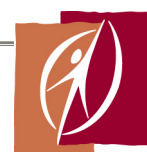
APPENDIX 2. MEASURES OF SCHOOL READINESS

Arranged according to Meisels' four constructs

Meisels' View	Measurement Instrument	Author/Organisation	Description
Maturationist View	ADSC - *Australian Developmental Screening Checklist*	The Psychological Corporation	Administered by a psychologist, this measure is useful for cognitive development & psychomotor skills ages 6 months to 6 years.
	Gesell School Readiness Test	Gesell Institute of Human Development	An individual child's behaviours are observed and matched with normative patterns established for each developmental age. Useful to paediatricians, child psychologists, and other professionals who work with children in relation to appropriate curricular expectations for children at various developmental ages.
	Who Am I?	De Lemos, Molly Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the Applied Research Branch Strategic Policy Human Resources Development Canada	*Who am I?* was developed at ACER for a project investigating factors relating to children's development in the early years of schooling over the period 1997 to 1999. This measure is applicable for children from preschool to Year 2 (age four to seven years) and can be administered, either individually or in small groups, by class teachers. The *Who am I?* Test involves copying and writing tasks designed to assess a child's ability to conceptualize and reconstruct geometric shapes, and understand and use symbols like letters and words. This measure has now been applied in Australia, Canada, Sweden, India and Hong Kong.

Meisels' View	Measurement Instrument	Author/Organisation	Description
Environmental View	*AEDI – Australian Early Development Index*	Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne	A community measure of young children's development, based on the scores from a teacher-completed checklist consisting of over 100 questions. Administered by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, it requires teachers of the first year of formal schooling to complete online surveys about each child in their class. Data is then analysed and reported back to schools and communities.
	The National Schools Readiness Indicators	Rhode Island KIDS COUNT	The *School Readiness Indicators Initiative* was a multi-state initiative that uses child well-being indicators to build a change agenda in states and local communities in order to improve school readiness and ensure early school success.
	PPVT - Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test	American Guidance Service	A leading measure of receptive vocabulary for standard English. This individually administered, norm-referenced instrument is offered in two parallel forms—IIIA and IIIB—for reliable testing and retesting. This measure can be administered by a school guidance officer or psychologist.
	IESIP – Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program Preschool Profile	Department of Education, Training and the Arts, Queensland Government	A preschool profile developed by IESIP providing supplementary assistance to state schools with indigenous Australian student populations to progress educational outcomes for these students. It is administered through educational institutions, such as C&K Child Care.
	Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence	The Psychological Corporation	Administered by a school guidance officer or psychologist, this measure of intelligence in young children that is age appropriate.

Meisels' View	Measurement Instrument	Author/Organisation	Description
	Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale	Roid	A measure of cognitive ability in verbal reasoning, abstract/visual reasoning, quantitative reasoning and short-term memory to determine an age score with the average score of 100 for each age group. This measure can be administered by a school guidance officer or psychologist.
	FirstSTEP – Screening Test for Evaluating Preschoolers	Miller	Early Childhood Professionals use this screening test to detect mild developmental delays and identify children who need in-depth diagnostic testing. It addresses cognition, communication and motor skills.
	ToPP - Test of Pretend Play	Lewis and Boucher	*ToPP* is used by clinicians with a wide variety of children to assess levels of: conceptual development and ability to use symbols; child's imaginative ability and creativity; child's emotional status; developmental difficulties.
	Preschool Language Scale Scores	Zimmerman, et al.	Clinicians widely use this measure, which uses two broad subscales: Auditory Comprehension and Expressive Communication to assess a variety of language based skills.
Social Constructivist View	*Pathways to Outcomes School Readiness Indicators*	Pathways Mapping Initiative	These indicators include good health; supportive social and cognitive environments; safe, strong neighbourhoods, family-friendly physical environments; and responsive, effective schools.
	HOME inventory	Linver, Brooks-Gunn and Cabrera	Includes items indicative of literacy in the child's environment: "child has access to at least 10 children's books; at least ten books are visible in the home; family buys and reads a daily newspaper; child has three or more books of his or her own."

Meisels' View	Measurement Instrument	Author/Organisation	Description
	ECPERS – Early Childhood Physical Rating Scale	Moore, et al	A tool for centre directors, early childhood educators, policy makers and regulators to assess the quality of the physical environment of childcare, preschool, kindergarten and other early childhood education settings.
	ITERS – Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale	Harms, Clifford and Cryer	A Scale designed to assess centre-based child care programs for infants and toddlers up to 30 months of age. Coaches, teachers, teacher aides and recreation professional can be trained to administer this measure to help improve the quality of children's programs.
	SACERS – School Age Care Environment Rating Scale	Harms, Jacobs, and Romano	Designed to assess group-care programs for children of school age, 5 to 12. Coaches, teachers, teacher aides and recreation professional can be trained to administer this measure to help improve the quality of children's programs.
	FDCRS – Family Day Care Rating Scale	Harms, Clifford and Cryer	Designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a provider's home for children from infancy through school-age. Coaches, teachers, teacher aides and recreation professional can be trained to administer this measure to help improve the quality of children's programs.
Interactionist View	*ECERS - Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*	Harms, Clifford & Cryer	This scale is used to compare transition environments (e.g. preschool and prep classes). It is used by certified evaluators to measure the environment in terms of: space and furnishing; personal care; language/ reasoning activities; interaction; programme structure; parents & staff.
	Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning – 3rd edition (DIAL – 3)	Mardell-Czudnowski & Goldenberg	Used by early childhood specialists, preschool and kindergarten teachers, *Head Start* programs, and child development centres, in combination with the ECERS (above) it measure children's gross and fine motor development; basic concepts; language; and gives an overall composite score to the child.