MONASH University

GROUP OF EIGHT AUSTRALIA

Education

Transition: A Positive Start to School

For:

The Department of Education and Training, Victoria

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Executive Summary

This project builds upon the research findings to date that identify the importance of reciprocal visits by educators for the benefit of children, families and the educators themselves. In particular, this project combines professional learning with reciprocal visits through the development of specific learning programs. The purpose was to increase understanding of curriculum design, planning and pedagogy, through processes of collaboration and shared professional learning.

The project implemented a learning program consisting of reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions at two sites within Victoria, Banyan Fields and Puckapunyal. Throughout 2014 and 2015, teachers and educators from neighbouring schools and early childhood programs worked together to build a better understanding of transition processes within and across their contexts.

Data was collected from the participants about the effectiveness of the program, including focus groups, evaluation protocols and professional learning videos. The relational agency[1] framework for building multidisciplinary networks in Victoria was used to analyse the data.

The findings suggest all phases of the relational agency framework developed throughout the learning program. By the conclusion of the project, all participants had increased their knowledge and understanding about transitions and were able to work together to create a series of local principles for transition that could be implemented at both the early childhood program and the school. Both location sites showed a strong interest in providing a continuity of pedagogy and practice. The transition networks were also able to develop a strong sense of belonging, and the development of transition activities and processes to sustain and enhance practices for the future.

The success of the program was dependent on a number of key considerations. The first was allowing sufficient resources to afford all participants time to enable their involvement in both the reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions. The second consideration was the important combination of reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions. In combination, the learning program was able to identify and contributed to support participants through all phases of the relational agency framework. Thirdly, it was important to the participants that the learning facilitator/Monash team were external to the sites, allowing opportunities for objective views and alternative perspectives to be explored. The learning facilitator was important for the de-briefing after the reciprocal visits and for scaffolding learning during the professional learning sessions.

Overall, transition the local networks engaging in reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions contributed to improving their understanding about transition processes and practices. While this study only worked with two sites, the initial findings are significant and should encourage further research to build the evidence of effective multi-disciplinary networks within Victoria to enhance transition processes.

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[1](Edwards, 2004). .

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1 Project Overview

1.1 Background

The Victorian Department of Education & Training has a history of being committed to improving transition to primary school for children, families and educators. This supports the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (2009) and the Transition: A Positive Start to School Initiative (2009).

In 2008, the Victorian government commissioned 30 pilot projects as part of the Transition: A Positive Start to School Initiative. The pilots, which ran until May 2009, trialled or extended a range of transition approaches in a diverse range of Victorian communities. They provided valuable insights into how children's transition to school can be successfully supported. In 2009 a small-scale evaluation of these pilots was conducted by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education Centre for Program Evaluation (University of Melbourne), in which some 'promising practices' emerged. One promising practice highlighted the importance of reciprocal visits for educators: early childhood educators and prep teachers visiting each other's environment to participate in meetings, joint teaching, transition planning, etc. The evaluation highlighted the value of ongoing communication between educators to improve professional relationships and contribute to curriculum/pedagogical refinements to support continuity of children's learning and their transition to school.

In 2011 a follow-up evaluation of the Transition Initiatives was conducted. Several findings related to the importance of stronger relationships between early childhood and school professionals, and noted that early childhood professionals valued acknowledgement and feedback as a way of improving the quality of information provided to prep teachers.

Following 2012, an action research project[2] was undertaken in 15 sites across Victoria. The research explored the efficacy of three promising practices—including reciprocal visits for educators—to support a positive transition to school. A key finding was that reciprocal visits between educators from primary schools and early childhood settings foster a better understanding of the work undertaken by each group and the development of a deeper respect for each other's work. A key purpose of sharing information is to provide continuity for children and families with this advice supporting the continuation of successful strategies for individual children and groups. Educators involved in the project reported that undertaking reciprocal visits had positive outcomes for themselves, children and their families. Educators also noted the research resulted in the:

- introduction of more play-based learning in Foundation Year classrooms early in the school year;
- incorporation of different skill development activities to promote school success in early childhood programs;
- effective sharing of information about children and families between settings;
- familiarity with children created better class groupings in prep and the ability to tailor prep programs to children's individual needs from the first days of school; and
- improved understandings, relationships and respect.

1.2 Aim of project

This project built upon the research findings to date that identify the importance of reciprocal visits by educators for the benefit of children, families and the educators themselves. The

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[2] (*Research into Practices to Support a Positive Start to School*, Equity and Childhood Program, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne 2012)

Victorian Department of Education and Training commissioned Monash University to work across two locations, one regional and one urban, in 2014-15. In particular this project combined professional learning with reciprocal visits in the development of specific learning programs. The purpose was to increase understanding of curriculum design, planning and implementation including content, pedagogy, assessment, feedback and reporting through shared professional learning as part of reciprocal visits.

An additional goal was to support stronger relationships around children's transitioning to school between educators and children and their families.

Associate Professor Janet Scull and Dr Susanne Garvis worked with the teachers to explore theoretically informed, research-based practices to support children's learning. The project included the production of video vignettes based on the professional interactions occurring before, during and after the visits. In keeping with the defined timelines that reflect the Transition to school this project worked across both the year before and the first year of school.

The project was expected to yield positive outcomes for the educators who participate in reciprocal visits by enhancing professional development opportunities and engendering a new understanding and respect between early childhood and school educators about the work that they each do to support children's learning.

1.3 Key components of each site

Each case site has four common components.

These are:

1.   specifically designed learning programs;
2.   development of shared projects;
3.   the use of video; and
4.   the appointment of a Learning Facilitator and Monash staff.

A description of each component is given below.

1. Specifically designed learning programs

The learning program at each site consisted of a combination of reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions. The reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions were strategically organised to support and enhance learning and reflections about the site specific focus.

2. Development of shared projects

The project concentrated on the strengths that teachers bring to their work and, in particular their understanding of transition processes. The project implemented a strengths-based approach that recognises that all participants have strengths in both knowledge and dispositions which they use in their teaching and learning. Educators and teachers were considered active participants in the design and development process, with a clear emphasis on practical solutions to local issues.

Priority was given to the development of the relationships fostered through collaboration as educators worked together to focus on positive learning outcomes for children and families. Opportunities were given to share practice and to build an appreciation of the roles of other disciplines, as this was considered integral to the development of the learning program.

The learning program at both sites was based around reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions. The focus of the learning program was tailored to each site's needs and interests. This consisted of initially working with key stakeholders and educators to develop an individualised site learning program that accounted for local differences and the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of children and families in each location. An emphasis on this aspect of work was on promoting a common language and pedagogy to support the continuity of learning for children and to build an understanding of effective early years teaching practices in both early childhood and primary school settings.

3. The use of video to enhance and record learning

The learning program introduced the use of video, both to support the process for learning and as a documentation of the project. Videoing occurred during the reciprocal visits and the professional learning sessions. Video excerpts were used to successfully engage teachers and educators and supported explorations, and the investigation of topics, particularly when paired with discussions facilitated by the independent consultant to promote interaction.

As a final product, two videos have been created for each site that share vignettes of teacher practice and learning. The videos showcase the learning that had taken place and provide a professional learning tool for other early years professionals interested in reciprocal visiting to support and strengthen transition programs. The videos provide opportunity for schools and early childhood services to reflect on their own practice in regards to how they might learn from the experiences of others.

4. Learning facilitator and Monash staff

A learning facilitator (LF) was employed to help develop participants' skills and confidence to discuss their knowledge and understanding with others and to be mentored throughout the process. Key aspects of this role included scaffolding teachers learning and assisting in the sharing of practice across early childhood and school sites. The learning facilitators appointed to this project have extensive experience as early years educators, critical friends and mentors. They were well positioned to coach and support the work of educators and teachers in early childhood and schools. Emphasis was placed on continuity of practice across the early childhood and school sites to support children's transition and facilitate a positive start to school.

Associate Professor Janet Scull and Dr Susie Garvis worked with the teachers to explore theoretically informed, research-based practices to support children's learning. Emphasis was placed on continuity of practice across the preschool and school sites to support children's transition and facilitate a positive start to school.

1.4   Transition Sites

1.4.1   Puckapunyal site

The Puckapunyal site is located within the Puckapunyal Military area, 10km west of Seymour in Central Victoria. The site consists of Puckapunyal Primary School, with Puckapunyal Kindergarten and Mission Australia Early Learning Centre Puckapunyal across the road.

Puckapunyal Primary School is a unique school in Australia. The sons and daughters of Defence Force Personnel, stationed within the Puckapunyal Military Area, comprise 90% of its enrolment, and annually up to 50% of the children transfer interstate and overseas. The high level of mobility has a significant effect on the continuity of school programs and consequently student achievement. For instance, few children who begin school in Prep in 2012 will be at the school for 3 years. It is difficult then to be specific about Academic Performance Targets when, for the 4-year life of a Strategic Plan, the school will be dealing with a different cohort each year. At the commencement of the 2015 school year, it is unlikely that many of the students currently enrolled will still be at the school. The new arrivals come from a diverse range of educational backgrounds (each State and Territory of Australia, UK, Canada, U.S.A., New Zealand, Malaysia and Germany). Of note is the increasing number of children enrolling from the surrounding farming community and those prepared to drive their children from Seymour, the largest nearby centre.

The school believes that a child learns best when they feel secure about their home and school environments, and at the same time are developing skills to face unfamiliar situations in the future. The school offers individual attention and special support to all children. Each child's education should inspire them to become life-long learners. The school commits all its physical and human resources to help achieve this aim.

The Puckapunyal Kindergarten offers programs for a group of three year olds and groups of four year olds as part of a play-based early childhood program. It is a community managed

Kindergarten. Puckapunyal Kindergarten has a 15 hour program for the 4 year olds and offers two 3 hour sessions for 3 year olds. It is conveniently located opposite the Puckapunyal Primary School in a Multi-Purpose Child Care Centre and services predominantly children from parents employed by the defence force.

The Mission Australia Early Learning Centre, Puckapunyal provides long day care and early childhood education for children aged six weeks to five years. It is a community based, centre predominately for children from parents employed by the defence force.

There is currently a Puckapunyal Learning Community Transition Meeting Group which was formed in 2014. This group consists of early years professionals across the three early years settings. The group meets regularly to discuss transition activities for the children. Examples of activities include:

- Transition visits for kindergarten children to school during Term 3 for example activities such as a sport and library session;
- Transition visits during Term 4 on a Friday;
- Prep students visiting the Kindergarten.

Centres and Participants

- Puckapunyal Primary School - Assistant Principal and 2 Prep Teachers;
- Puckapunyal Kindergarten – 1 Educator;
- Mission Australia Early Learning Centre - 1 Director, 4 Educators in total, over the 2014–2015 school years.

It was important at this site to have an engaged and enthusiastic leader participate. The Assistant Principal was an active participant in the program, attending all professional learning sessions, engaging in the visits and playing a key coordination role in the scheduling and organising of visit and professional learning sessions.

Learning Program

Table 1. Schedule for Learning Program at Site 1

Date	Session	Focus	Participants
August 11 2014	Site Visit	Identify sites, participants and processes for the Transition: a positive start to school project.	Assistant Principal Susanne Garvis Janet Scull
October 9 2014	Professional Learning Session 1	Introduce the purpose and focus of the Transition: A positive start to school project.	2 early childhood teachers Mission Aust. Centre Director
	Reciprocal Visits 1	Initial visits to observe Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) rooms and Prep classrooms.	2 Prep teachers Assistant Principal Janet Scull Vivienne Moore (LF)
October 13-17 2014	Classroom filming	Video recordings of teaching for review and reflection	
October 20 2014	Professional Learning Session 2	Review and reflection of teaching videos. Identification of teaching common practice.	3 Early childhood teachers Centre Director 2 Prep teachers

			Assistant Principal Janet Scull Vivienne Moore (LF)
November, 3, 11 and 19 2014	Reciprocal Visits 2	Paired teaching visits (book reading) – early childhood teaching working in primary classrooms, primary teaching working in ECEC rooms.	Early childhood and primary school teacher dyads. Vivienne Moore (LF)
December 8 2014	Professional Learning Session 3	Review of paired teaching videos.	3 Early childhood teachers Centre Director 2 Prep teachers Assistant Principal Janet Scull Vivienne Moore (LF)
March 17 2015	Reciprocal Visits 3	Collaborative teaching sessions, primary teachers working in ECEC rooms.	3 Primary school teachers 3 Early childhood teachers Janet Scull
March 25 2015	Professional Learning Session 4	Visit reflections. Series of local principles for transition. Future planning.	3 Early childhood teachers 2 Prep teachers Assistant Principal Janet Scull

1.4.2 Carrum Downs site

The second site is located in Carrum Downs and consists of Banyan Fields Primary School, William Road Kindergarten (Community Kinders Plus) and Banyan Fields Kindergarten (Community Kinders Plus). Carrum Downs is situated within the Frankston City Council, 34km south east of Melbourne's CBD.

There are currently transition activities organised between the school and early childhood programs that focus on the children's transition. Examples of these activities include:

- Preschool children visit to prep classrooms at Banyan Fields Primary school for activities;
- Visits by preschool children to Banyan Fields Primary school playground outside recess and lunchtimes;
- Buddy children between Banyan Fields Primary School and Banyan Fields Kindergarten to wetlands;
- Vegetable gardens created where Banyan Fields Primary School children and Banyan Fields Kindergarten children work together to develop the vegetable plots;
- Storytime at the Banyan Fields Kindergarten where year six students visit;
- Banyan Fields Kindergarten children as audience members for prep matinee performance.

Centres and Participants

- Banyan Fields Primary School- 4 Prep Teachers over the 2014, 2015 school year;
- William Road Kindergarten- 1 Educator;
- Banyan Fields Kindergarten- 5 Educators;

ᴥ CEO for Community Kinder Plus.

Learning Program

Table 2. Schedule for Learning Program at Site – Banyan Fields

Date	Session	Focus	Participants
August 8 2014	Site Visit	Identify sites, participants and processes for the Transition: A Positive Start to School project.	Principal Susanne Garvis Janet Scull
September 2014	Reciprocal Visit - 1	Initial visit to observe early childhood rooms and practices.	4 Prep teachers
October 14 2014	Reciprocal Visits – 2a	Early childhood educators visit to Prep classrooms. Observe and reflect on practices.	2 Early childhood educators Susie Garvis Marian Nicolazzo (LF)
October 17 2014	Reciprocal Visits – 2b	Early childhood teacher visit to Prep classrooms. Observe and reflect on practices.	2 Early childhood educators Susanne Garvis Marian Nicolazzo (LF)
October 22 2014	Reciprocal Visits – 2c	Early childhood teacher visit to Prep classrooms. Observe and reflect on practices.	2 early childhood educators Janet Scull Marian Nicolazzo (LF)
October 29 2014	Professional Learning Session 1	Introduce the purpose and focus of the Transition: A Positive Start to School project. Reflection on RVs 1 and 2.	4 Prep teachers 4 early childhood teachers Janet Scull Marian Nicolazzo (LF)
	Classroom filming	Video recordings of teaching for review and reflection on November 12.	Marian Nicolazzo (LF)
November 12 2014	Professional Learning Session 2	Review and reflection of teaching videos. Identification of teaching common practices.	4 Early childhood teachers 5 Primary School. CEO CKP Janet Scull Marian Nicolazzo (LF)
December 2014	Reciprocal Visit 3	Prep teachers to visit early childhood setting and engage teaching program, consider implications for programing and planning for children in February 2015.	3 Primary teachers 4 Early Childhood educators Susanne Garvis

February 24 2015	Reciprocal Visit 4a	Early childhood educators visit to primary school to observe teaching.	Marian Nicolazzo
February 26 2015	Reciprocal Visit 4b	Early childhood educators visit to primary school to observe teaching.	Marian Nicolazzo
March 2 2015	Professional Learning Session 3	Visit reflections. Series of local principles for transition. Future planning.	3 Primary teachers 4 Early childhood educators CEO KCP Janet Scull Marian Nicolazzo

2 Data collection

The project collected four main types of data[3]. The data collected consisted of:

- ♟ Observations of the Reciprocal Visits (RV) and Professional Learning (PL) programs;
- ♟ Videos of the professional learning sessions, including reflection activities on video recall;
- ♟ Group evaluation of the project during the final professional learning session with a Positive Minus Interesting (PMI) table;
- ♟ Four 30-minute focus group interviews with teachers and educators after the final professional learning session (two focus groups per a site);
- ♟ Development of a list of principles of practice created by each site.

3 Findings

Data was analysed within the analytical framework of the Reciprocal Agency Framework. The Relational Agency Framework[4] is a model that can accommodate the practitioner experiences and accounts for the documented professional relationships in the networks. It was developed from an analysis of a Review and Evaluation of the Inquiry to Implementation Project in multidisciplinary networks in Victoria. The Framework is shown below in table 1. While indicating progression over time, the phases in Table 3 should not be read as linear and hierarchical, but rather as a continual spiral[5].

Table 3: A Relational Agency Framework for building multidisciplinary networks in Victoria

Phases	Key idea
Foundational	Building a sense of belonging to a network
Phase 1	Finding out about each other's services
Phase 2	Engaging in a common experience or process
Phase 3	Building a common focus for the group
Phase 4	Building a common language
Phase 5	Aligning one's own interpretation with that of others
Phase 6	Thinking about one's own professional expertise and contribution in relation to what others with different disciplinary/community knowledge and practice bring

[3]Consent was gained from all participants to take part. Video footage and focus group footage was transcribed once collected. The project received approval from the University Ethics Committee and the Department Education, and Early Childhood Development.

[4](Duhn et al. 2014)

[5](Duhn et al., 2014)

Phase 7	Enhanced professional practice where one's own contributions are viewed as part of the collectively identified professional inquiry or need

The Relational Agency Framework is a tool to support the establishment, maintenance and growth of early years practitioners as they engage in professional learning within different networks. According to Duhn et al (2014), the Framework can be used to inform the development of existing early years networks and support the establishment of new early years networks. In this project, it was used for the establishment of new early years networks between the school and early childhood services. The first stage was the mapping of the reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions with the relational agency framework (see table 4 and table 5 in the appendix).

The initial mapping showed that all stages of the Relational Agency Framework were achieved. Over time both sites developed a sense of belonging and started to build upon their common language. The final stages showed a sharing of knowledge and understanding, leading to an enhanced level of professional practice.

All levels within the relational agency framework were also shown within the focus groups at both sites. In particular, participants seemed to acknowledge the importance of building a positive relationship and building a level of trust and understanding between the two contexts. Through a sense of belonging, the participants appeared to be able to then reflect on their own practices and develop a better understanding of their own and other's role within the group (see Table 6 in the appendix).

From the evaluation, all participants indicated they felt positive about involvement in the program and reflected on the importance of the visits to learn about different educational contexts. This included sharing information about and planning for children in each of the different sites and a stronger understanding the continuity of learning and practice that was required. All participants rated involvement in the reciprocal visits and the professional learning program as useful.

Both groups reflected on the initial differences between the kindergarten context and the schooling context. For some early childhood educators it was a positive experience to observe children they had previous connections with. After developing a sense of belonging within the transition network, the participants began to consider other aspects of their work such as engagement with families and the communities. The participants also began to consider the continuity in their own pedagogy. From the reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions, participants realised that sometimes pedagogy aligned and sometimes it was different. This reflected the teachers and educators appreciation of the progressions in children's development and the need for pedagogical practices that respond appropriately to children's changing learning needs.

Teachers and educators at both sites were asked to reflect on their own professional learning and growth. Using the 'PMI' protocol they were asked to identify aspects the project and that were Positive, Negative and/or Interesting. The questions below were provided to guide their review and prompt responses.

- Consider the role of the Professional Learning sessions of opportunities for professional dialogue.
- The impact of the reciprocal visits on teaching practice?
- An honest critique – what could have been done better? What other opportunities could have been provided?

Findings from the PMI table are listed in Table 7.

Table 7. Reflections on the transition program

Site	Positive	Minus	Interesting
Puckapunyal	• Opportunities to be in each other's spaces. • Getting to know and building relationship with staff and students. • Great to see others' plans for different centres. • Continuing of knowledge of families and students between settings – Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).	• Time management, logistics. • Feeling uncomfortable being filmed. • Took a while to trust others.	• Need to think about Transition Statements and meeting, sharing day. • Need to think about common communication with families e.g. shared letterhead. • Combined Professional Learning and sharing resources.
Banyan Fields	• Formed good working relationships – feel welcome to visit freely now. • Sharing of resources. • "Opened new doors" • Wide range of experiences shared. • Enabled professional dialogue. • Chance to influence change. • Beneficial for Kindergarten families to have Prep teachers become familiar with Kindergarten expectations and practice. • Watching videos of practice allowed for reflection and self-reflection.	• Early Childhood teachers in Prep classrooms at end of year not so useful. • Time management. • Difficult to ask questions to teacher you were visiting if they were teaching the class.	• More opportunities for co-teaching. • More reciprocal visits would be useful to allow for co-planning and teaching. • Debriefing time needs to be included straight after visits. • Possibility of funding from Early Years Transition Network to continue this work. • Better for early childhood teachers to visit Preps in Term 1 and Prep teachers to visit early childhood setting in Term 4.

In addition, during the final PD session, participants developed a series of local principles to guide transition practices at each of their sites. These local principles for transition would be used to further enhance and continue the sustainability of practice that had been developed around the reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions. At the Banyan Field site, the series of local principles for transition developed were:

1. Building positive working relationships;
2. Appreciating and using shared knowledge of children;
3. Developing shared understandings of curriculum pedagogy;
4. Strengthening communication.

At the Puckapunyal site, the series of local principles for transition were also developed by the participants to continue the sustainability of the work that had been done and to develop a continuity of approach and pedagogy for children and families. For the Puckapunyal site the series of local principles for transition were:

1. Establishing professional, respectful relationships;
2. Sharing knowledge of children to ensure a holistic approach, and shared responsibility for children and families;
3. Collaborating to build a common pedagogy or an appreciation of pedagogy, participation in planning and implementing teaching across settings;
4. Developing a shared language to support understandings of practice;
5. Engaging in combined professional learning opportunities.

These local principles allowed the transition networks to conceptualise their professional learning and develop a shared vision for transition practices. This includes developing a continuity of pedagogy and practice that could be implemented in both settings.

The report will now discuss what the data shows in relation to the use of reciprocal visits and professional learning to enhance transition networks.

4 Discussion

Enhanced Relational Agency leading to improved transition practices

The data collected suggests that the reciprocal visits and professional learning enhanced and sustained relational agency within the group. The reciprocal visits were able to:

- Build a sense of belonging to a network (foundational phase);
- Allow participants to find out about each of the different learning contexts (phase 1);
- Engage in a common experience of process (phase 2);
- Build a common language (phase 4).

One of the key elements to the reciprocal visits was to have a focus of the visit and to also allow time for a debrief and reflection after the visit with the learning facilitator. The learning facilitator was able to extend the critical reflection and able to scaffold the learning after each visit. As the learning facilitator was external to the sites, they were considered independent did not have an association or bias to either site. Rather the learning facilitator had experience in both sites. This may have contributed to detailed critical reflection with participants realising that their practices and reflections were not judged or criticised. This allowed for the non-judgmental appraisal of teaching, with new insights shared from an 'outsider' perspective.

Another key element of the reciprocal visits was their continuity throughout 2014 and 2015. By having a number of visits scheduled over the calendar school years, educators were able to observe the difference in learners as well as in pedagogy. The visits provided a stronger opportunity to reflect on child learning and development within the transition process and how children and families could be best supported throughout this period of change.

To deepen teachers and educators' knowledge and understanding, a series of professional learning sessions were scheduled. The professional learning sessions appeared to provide enhanced opportunities for other phases of the relational agency framework to be addressed. The professional learning workshops were able to:

- Build a common focus for the group (phase 3);
- Build a common language surrounding transition and the principles of practice (phase 4);
- Allow opportunities for alignment of one's own interpretation with those of others through workshop activities and video recall (phase 5);
- Allow participants to think about their own professional expertise and contribute in relation to what others with a difference disciplinary/community knowledge and practice bring (phase 6);
- Allow for enhanced professional practice when one's own contributions are viewed as part of the collectively identified professional inquiry or need (phase 7).

The professional learning sessions provided an opportunity for mutual respect between the prior to school and school setting to develop, with each participant learning about the other site as well as how this can relate to their own pedagogical practice.

The professional learning program complemented the RV and contributed the teachers' learning in three distinct ways.

First, it allowed the teachers to identify as a network, and to set goals for the project that were particular to pedagogy and practice. This shifted the focus of transition from the children and the series of events planned to develop children's confidence and familiarity with school, to thinking more specifically about the continuity and coherence of teaching and learning experiences that facilitate children's progression from early childhood services to school.

Second, it allowed for reflection on the RV and videos of practice. Opportunities to discuss the visit observations on the day of the visit were at times limited. On some occasions both teachers and educators were released (the visitor and visited) and on others they were not.

Further as a visitor, observing teaching, there a number of conventions and protocols that are observed related to ways teachers might provide feedback and comment on teaching. Creating opportunities to reflect on and discuss the visits in a neutral space and at time distanced from the event allowed for open, honest, review and questioning of practices. Further, the use of video of practice during these sessions allowed the teacher/educator who was filmed to provide explanations and elaborations of teaching and engage two-way discussions not possible when being observed 'in situ'. Viewing examples of teaching, side by side, highlighted the practices that were common across sites, the progressions in children learning and the need for contingent teaching, responsive to the children's developing needs.

Third, the PL sessions, allowed for extended dialogue and provided opportunities for deeper analysis and evaluation of practices. It was during the PL sessions, facilitated by Monash staff, that teachers and educators were prompted to critique their current practices, and challenged to review and consider reforms to teaching that might bring about a closer alignment of processes and pedagogy across the sites.

Key considerations from the program

While the reciprocal visits and the professional learning sessions appeared effective in enhancing transition practices within the learning sites, it is important to also consider key elements that provided the opportunities for teachers and educators to participate.

First, resourcing was important to allow teacher and educator to engage in reciprocal visits and the professional learning sessions. The funding allowed participants from the early childhood and the school to come together to develop their understanding and knowledge about transitions further. Schools may need to consider ways to prioritise resources to facilitate reciprocal visits and shared professional learning opportunities.

A second key aspect was to have both reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions. Both complemented each other and provided opportunities for deeper learning and understanding within the transition network. The professional learning sessions also allowed the development of plans for future transition networks and allowed participants to conceptualise their understanding in the creation of the principles of practice that would be implemented at both sites. In future thinking about improving transition practices to allow children to have positive starts to school, it would be important to consider combinations of reciprocal visits with professional learning sessions.

A third consideration is the importance of an external team to design and support the learning within the transition network. In this project, the learning facilitator and Monash University staff appeared to play a crucial role in supporting the critical reflection and professional learning after the reciprocal visits during the debriefing sessions. The Monash team was also important during the professional learning sessions. The external consultant/expert valued as 'outside' of both contexts yet able to recognise and appreciate the contributions of both sites to children learning.

5 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Sustainability is created through a shared vision achieved through building partnerships and context specific aims for each site

The reciprocal visits and professional learning workshops provided the opportunity to the build partnerships between the different sites. A plan of regular reciprocal visits and professional learning workshops fostered the partnership and created sustainability through a shared vision of developing principles for practice. This has led to ongoing dialogue between the different sites, with regular meetings and events planned for the future.

The shared vision for each site was created after the first meeting. The shared vision was created based on contextual and cultural context that was important to the site. The participants were able to create a project that was important for their own professional learning that would benefit not only the partnership with the different sites, but also their own teaching pedagogy.

Recommendation 2: The co-development of the reciprocal visit and professional learning framework is important

The development of the learning frame for this project includes reciprocal visits and professional learning workshops. The reciprocal visits provided opportunities for teachers to observe and learn about pedagogy in different practices. After reciprocal visits reflection opportunities provided opportunities for critical learning. The final reciprocal visits provided opportunities for co-teaching children in different age groups.

Prior to the first professional learning session, teachers and educators were filmed. The video was then used to prompt discussion and reflection between the different sites as a starting point to explore similarities and differences in pedagogical practice. In the final professional learning workshop workshop, a list of practice principles or schemas were created to foster commitment to transition processes, continuity of practice between the sites and a sense of shared responsibility for the children. The final professional learning workshop also allowed time for future planning, allowed the continuation and sustainability of learning and improving transitions.

Recommendation 3: Schools need to prioritise resources to facilitate reciprocal visits and professional learning sessions

From the project, investing initial resourcing to support the release of teachers and educators to visit each other was important. Allowing release time provided opportunities for the teachers and educators to learn about pedagogies and practices that were occurring in the other settings as part of the reciprocal visits. Release time also provided opportunities for joint professional learning workshops that provided opportunities for teachers and educators to develop a shared understanding of their own pedagogy and practice and how they can work with each other across other settings. Professional learning workshops also provided time for joint planning of future activities and continue productive communication.

Time was also needed after reciprocal visits and the professional learning session for reflection. For the teachers and educators, it was important that they were scaffolded in the process by an external representative (in this case members of the research team) who did not come with pre-existing ideas or biases yet were able to provide informed perspectives drawing theory and research based practice. The external representative was able to see connections that may not have been able to be identified by the participants in the context, allowing deeper learning to take place.

Recommendation 4: Further research continue into transition projects that support and develop teacher pedagogy to support young children's learning

It is important the ongoing research is continued within transition projects at a local, state and national level. This project has explored the importance of reciprocal visits and professional learning activities based on a focus area within the sites. It is important that future research support and develop teacher pedagogy to support young children's learning, leading to an improved transition process. In this project both sites were interested in the continuity of practice between the different sites and were able to create schemas of practice to be implemented beyond the project.

6 Appendix

Table 4. Site one: Evidence of data linked to relational agency framework

Phases	Key idea	Activity	Details/description
Foundational	Building a sense of belonging to a network	Professional Learning - Session 1	Teachers and educators acknowledged their commitment to transition practices and recognised the positive aspects the transition program currently in place to support children as the move from the early childhood settings to school.
Phase 1	Finding out about each other's services	Reciprocal Visit - 1	Observation and discussion during this visit facilitated understanding of the three services, more specifically in terms of design of the teaching spaces. Discussion related to rationales for the different teaching and learning spaces and children's use of the spaces provided. Routines and were shared. Similarities and differences in the classroom designs and expectations for learning were discussed. The attention to small group activities and children 'choice' in the preschool where compared to whole class activities and teacher directed activities the primary school. Notwithstanding also apparent were the approaches to teaching and belief about children that were shared across the sectors.
Phase 3	Building a common focus for the group	Professional Learning - Session 1	Videos of early childhood teachers reading books to children were viewed and discussed. Aspects of the teachers' interactions and attention to literacy concepts were discussed and compared to the teachers' own practices. This provided a stimulus for the teachers be filmed reading a book to children, as a common experience across all settings, that could be used to closely examine the teachers' interactions with children and establish understandings of shared pedagogy. Teachers/educators agreed to arrange video recordings of their own practice.
Phase 4	Building a common language	Professional Learning -Session 2	Videos of the primary school teachers guided reading sessions were shared. The question framework from Scull, Paatsch& Raban (2013) was used to analyse the type and frequency of questions asked and to map children's responses to questions. This built a common language for talking about book reading interactions and pedagogical practices, that engage children in discussions about text meanings and

			provide opportunities for children express their understandings.
Phase 3	Building a common focus for the group		In primary school and early childhood teaching dyads teachers planned book-reading sessions using a common text. In the visits to follow, early childhood teachers would work with primary school children and the primary teachers in the early childhood setting to implement the planned book reading sessions.
Phase 5	Aligning one's own interpretation with that of others	Reciprocal Visits - 2	Visit occurred over three weeks and teacher dyads were released for a morning to work in each other rooms. Prep and early childhood educators read the same book to the children and compared their expectations and experiences. Discussions after the reading were facilitated to draw out the alignment of practices and highlight the areas differentiation, relative to the needs of the children.
Phase 5	Aligning one's own interpretation with that of others	Professional Learning - Session three	Video recordings the book reading session from the recent Reciprocal Visits were reviewed and discussed. Implications for practice, as children move from early childhood to school were considered. Specifically teacher/educators were asked to: • Identify common practices and patterns in talk interactions; • Note the progressions in children learning; and • Consider issues pertaining to continuity of practice. Key issues raised in the discussions included: • Providing a safe environment for children to express their ideas; • Teachers valuing children's views and opinions, acknowledging their responses; • Responding to children; • Fostering early book skills; • Encouraging the use of language; • Varied expectations related to the different age groups alongside teacher understandings of question types and techniques to cater for individual needs.
Phase 3	Building a common focus for the group		The focus shifted from book reading to pedagogy more generally and the opportunities in the early childhood setting for a more child centred curriculum, responsive to children's needs and interests. The affordance of play-based learning were explored as

Phase			
			means of further supporting children transition to school as common approaches to teaching and learning were implemented.
			Visits were planned for 2015 with emphasis on investigating the play-based pedagogies of the early childhood with attention to purposeful, goal centred teaching. Primary school teachers' visits to early childhood settings would involve planning and implementing teaching in collaboration with the early childhood educators. This intended to allow primary school teachers to experience play-based approaches.
Phase 4	Building a common language	Reciprocal Visits - three	Pre-visit meetings occurred, during which teachers and preschool educators worked together to plan sessions, sharing ideas and developing understandings of play as curriculum.
			Shared teaching sessions.
			1. Outdoor play – following the lead of early childhood educator the primary school teacher effectively responded to children's needs, "noticing, narrating nudging' the learning, to build and extend on children play experiences.
			2. 'We're going on a bear hunt' – a series of activities based on the text were planned and implemented. A focus of the teaching was the close was interactions with the small group and effectively responding to the children.
			Conversations after the visit focused on documenting children's learning and the purposeful intentional teaching that occurred.
Phase 5	Aligning one's own interpretation with that of others Thinking about one's own professional expertise and contribution in relation to what others with different disciplinary/commu nity knowledge and practice bring	Professional Learning - Session four	This session provided a further opportunity to reflect on the collaborative teaching and develop shared understanding of play-based teaching and the carefully considered ways the early childhood teacher document children learning.
			The integrated *Teaching and Learning Approaches* from the VEYLDF, using aspects of:
			• Guided play and learning. • Child directed learning. • Adult led learning
Phase 6	Thinking about one's own professional expertise and contribution in relation to what others with different		to analyse the teaching and to evaluate the affordances play environments and intentional teaching to children learning. Early childhood planning documents were shared and discussed. The primary school teachers expressed an appreciation for the high levels of

| | disciplinary/commu nity knowledge and practice bring | analysis of children's learning, linked to curriculum frameworks and quality learning standards. |

Table 5. Site Two: Evidence of data linked to relational agency framework

Phases	Key idea	Activity	Details/description
Phase 1	Finding out about each other's services	Reciprocal Visits - 1	Primary school teachers visit early childhood centre.
Phase 1	Finding out about each other's services	Reciprocal Visits - 2	Early childhood teachers visit to Primary school: • Discussed learning spaces, teaching program organisation and management processes. • Contrasts to preschool clearly apparent. • Concerns regarding the formal, teacher directed nature of the teaching observed.
Phase 1 Foundational Phase 4	Finding out about each other's services Building a sense of belonging to a network Building a common focus for the group	Professional Learning - Session one	Introduction to the Transition: A positive start to school program involving combined PL and RV with a focus on pedagogy, cross over skills, and strengthening connections between the early childhood and primary school. Teacher/educator commitment to transition project/programs and the benefits for children families. This program provides opportunities to: • Provide common language to discuss children's development in the early years. • Create and strengthen networks between early years professionals to ensure children get the best start. Sharing visit notes to identify connection between teaching practice. Recognition of the need to develop children's oral language. Opportunities to build children's oral language discussed: • Developmental play. • Investigations program. • Shared, sustained thinking. Teacher/educators to film small group oral language interactions in their settings as a stimulus for discussion and shared learning.
Phase 4	Building a common focus for the group	Professional Learning - Session two	Session focus around the opportunities for children to talk and to build language competence as a foundation for language and literacy learning through the common themes of play based learning at the and the Investigations program at school reiterated. A framework developed by Arthur et al. (2015) based on Siraj Blatchford's Sustained Shared thinking was used to analyse the teaching videos. In early childhood/primary school pairs teacher/educators view videos of practice to: • Share common practices. • Identify patterns and progressions in

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			conversational moves across settings.
			Noted similarities:
Phase 5	Aligning one's own interpretation with that of others		• Children engaged in tasks.
			• Focus on choice open ended tasks.
			• Balance between teacher and student/child talk.
			• Teacher questioning used to support diverse learners, noted use of WH- and HW questions to encourage children to think about their thinking.
			• Clear expectations for children.
			• The use of visual prompts across both contexts.
			• Teachers acted as active listeners, asking open-ended questions.
			• All children respected each other's spaces.
			Early childhood:
			• Children required more support with physical verbal/visual prompts used.
			• Smaller ratios hence teachers can work with targeted children, eg. quieter, less talkative children.
			• Took longer to focus, to get children settled in Kindergarten.
			• A conversational tone in Kindergarten.
			Primary School:
			• Shift from more hands on tasks accompanied by talk in Kindergarten to more abstract, formal written literacy tasks.
			• Prep, students using clearer, more projected voices.
			• Longer concentration span.
			• Prep children expected to listen to each other, to remember each other's contributions and build on these.
Phase 4	Building a common language		Teachers and educators where also asked to review video clips with a focus on the children's language. Aspects of children's varying control over language were identified – discussion focused on turn talking, fragmented language (lack of sustained conversations), the use or simple sentences, the influence of context, and shifts between early childhood and prep children's language use.
Phase 1	Findings out about each other's services	Reciprocal Visit 3	Primary teacher visit to early childhood centre.
			Observations of classroom teaching programs:
			• Involvement in outside activities.

			• Discussion on children's language levels.
			• Small group teaching.
			• Reflective tasks.
Phase 1	Finding out about each other's services	Reciprocal Visit 4a	Observations of classroom teaching programs:
			• Big book shared reading.
			• Copying text from the whiteboard.
			• Word recognition games.
			• Letter 'C' introduced – Cookie Monster video, making C with cornflakes, confetti. Matching words and pictures.
			• Number sequencing activities.
			• Book reading.
			Discussions with Learning Facilitator:
			• Concerns expressed regarding the contrast between early childhood and Prep programs.
			• Questions posed regarding children's readiness for formal and the opportunities for play-based learning.
			• The use of Transition Statements.
			Evident from this visit was the need for more dialogue between Early Childhood and Prep teachers.
Phase 1	Finding out about each other's services	Reciprocal Visit 4b	Observations of classroom teaching, Educators noted:
			• Teacher directed tasks.
			• Classroom expectations to participate and contribute.
			• Small group teaching.
			• Individual learning tasks.
			• Strong focus on letters and words.
			• Children had settled into routines well.
Foundational	Building a sense of belonging to a network	Professional Learning Session 3	In Early Childhood/ Prep pairs, teachers and educators asked to discuss implications of using Transition Statements for practice in terms of both curriculum and pedagogy.
			• Discussion noted the role of Transition Statements:
Phase 5	Aligning one's own interpretation with that of others		• To help both children and parents with transition.
			• For teachers to know what to expect.
			• Strength-based, designed around early childhood curriculum outcomes and principles.
			• Open to subjectivity.
			Comments also emphasised:
			• The "need to know what's written between

Phase		
		the lines", areas for improvement/concern.
		• Parent reports are insightful.
		• Also the need for more time to process these before the end of the year,
		• The 'Communication' section most helpful.
		• Effort of preparing statements acknowledged but could be modified to make them more useful.
		• Early childhood educator's comment "Being part of this project made me more aware of what I'm doing and how this feeds forward into school."
		Future direction:
		• Importance of relationships and knowing children and their families, the need to be "talking about things that are the same, building continuity and relationships – then other things are easy."
		• Need to collect as much information as possible and passing this on as early as possible. Face-to-face discussion around transition.
Phase 4	Building a common language.	• Links between Transition statements and the first school report. Perhaps school reports could include aspects of Identity, social development to make stronger connections to transition statements.
Phase 5	Aligning one's own interpretation with that of others	• School reports described as being more evidence-based. Teachers comment that formal testing undertaken early to identify 'at-risk' students, meeting then arranged with parents to discuss support strategies to be implemented.
		• Need for early childhood educators to develop familiarity with English online testing.

Table 6: Focus group interview data linked to relational agency framework

Phases	Key Idea	Description	Examples of Evidence
Foundational	Building a sense of belonging to a network	Developing a sense of belonging within the network is crucial to establishing both professional and personal authentic engagement.	"That's what everyone reports back is that face to face contact that is so critical in that transition process. You know, the written statements are great but it's that face to face contact" (Banyan Fields Kindergarten, Workshop 1).
			"Relationships built and sharing resources and that whole contact with each other has opened up a new avenue for us as teachers" (Banyan Fields Primary School, Workshop 3).
Phase 1	Finding out about each other's services	Members of the network discuss and discover what each member is doing.	"I learnt at the kindergarten, that although it may not appear structured when they are doing outdoor play it is a really structured time, that they are observing the children, they're finding out things about them," (Puckapunyal Primary School, Workshop 2)
			"I found it really interesting just to see the school and see how they do things because it so different to childcare" (Mission Australia Early Learning, Puckapunyal).
			The academic pressure. It's all about curriculum and data and learning. Not really about learning but we're not getting the chance to play and enquire or go off on tangents if we want to. We have to explore families three times a year, we have to learn about how things are made and how things move" (Banyan Fields Primary School, Workshop 2).
Phase 2	Engaging in a common experience of process	Network members engage in discussions of reflection of their common experiences relating to transition practices, pedagogical approaches and in particular the Learning and Development Transition Statements.	"It was really valuable watching myself back on the video, it was interesting, and when ** came across to me, the way she spoke to the children and presented the book, it was pretty much exactly the same as I would have done it as well" (Puckapunyal Primary School, Workshop 2).
			"I've always wondered with these whether on a preschool field officer report, which are strength based as well, there's strengths and then there's areas of concern or areas for development, whether somewhere in this there would be a space for the strengths but also the areas that

			we're continuing to work on" (Banyan Fields Kindergarten, Workshop 1).
			"Just observing each other's teaching, checking up ideas on strategies" (Banyan Fields Primary School, Workshop 2).
			I'd say it's more formal teaching where early childhood is more play based, where there is structure but not so structured like the school that they've got to have a curriculum that they've got to follow and make sure that those goals are met by a certain time where we sort of - we do have goals but it can be sort of the whole year" (Mission Australia Early Learning – Puckapunyal).
Phase 3	Building a common focus for the group	Network members discuss the common focus of the value and use of the transition statements, and teaching practices when working with children in the early years.	"I liked having them over the school holidays. I really liked having them. I know my class, I don't know anything more about them but I'm taking this hope, I've got a few weeks to, sort of, digest it and to think about it" (Banyan Fields Primary School, Workshop 1). "The relationship has certainly grown between the kindergarten and the school over the past few years, and what we've just been doing has just been reinforcing it…we all speak to each other a lot more and we've got the same common goal, it's no different" (Puckapunyal Primary School, Workshop 2).
Phase 4	Building a common language	Members of the network build a common language in terms of early years pedagogy and practices that include key statements from the VEYLDF and AusVELS.	"With going into the 3/4 room, I found there are a lot of things they were very similar with what I was doing, a lot of the language was very similar" (Puckapunyal Primary School, Workshop 2) "We've had that feedback that families have been reading their reports strengths based and they think that they're misunderstanding it and think that the information's not being relayed about their needs" (Banyan Fields Kindergarten, Workshop 1).
Phase 5	Aligning one's own interpretation with that of others	Network members discuss their reflections and analysis of their professional inquiry and that of their fellow members and develop an understanding of	"The primary outcome for us as a transition team and community for this project, is the knowledge around the core business of relationships, and relationships between educators and students, educators and educators and

		each other's pedagogy and teaching practices.	educators and families, and what those respectful professional and personal relationships can do to provide a continuity of learning from the groups of students" (Puckapunyal Primary School, Workshop 2).
Phase 6	Thinking about one's own professional expertise and contribution in relation to what others with different disciplinary/community knowledge and practice bring	Network members reflect and discuss their professional inquiry and ongoing challenges in relation to transition and teaching whilst also considering the differences others bring to this concept from different settings and different perspectives.	"I just wonder if there is some way that we, again, we can influence change in these reports so that they are more useful" (Community Kinders Plus). "It (the video) was good to be able to sit back and see how I do things and how I could improve on things and the language I've used with the different age group" (Puckapunyal, Workshop 2)
Phase 7	Enhanced professional practice when one's own contributions are viewed as part of the collectively identified professional inquiry or need	Network members reflect upon their learning and collectively engage in a professional enquiry to address the ongoing challenges in developing seamless transition for children.	"A different Pedagogy and a different way of learning then that might help influence a change. Which would be better for the children and for the teachers too" (Banyan Fields Kindergarten, Workshop 2).