

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROJECTS

IN

undertaken by the

*Investigating Quality in Early Childhood Education
and Care: A Multi perspective Approach (IQECEC)*
Research Group

2008

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THEME 1. TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

Project Title: *Successful Transition Programs from Prior-to-school to School for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*

Chief Investigators: Sue Dockett, Bob Perry, Tracey Simpson (CSU), Terry Mason (UWS)

Funding: National Fund for Educational Research, auspiced by NSW Department of Education and Training

Aims of the Project: A case study methodology, based on working together with school, prior-to-school and community members within a series of case study sites (10) and trial sites (5) across NSW was used to address the following key issues:

1. What are the features of successful programs of transition from prior-to-school to school that lead to improved student learning outcomes for Aboriginal children?
2. To what extent are these features transferable to other contexts and to what extent might these features be unique to any one particular site?
3. In what ways can linkages between schools, early childhood services and Aboriginal communities be improved to increase the educational attainment of Aboriginal children?
4. What strategies are successful in engaging families who don't readily engage with early childhood services and schools?

Status of Project: Final Report has been submitted and accepted. Report is available at
http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/ATSI_Successful_Transition_programs_Report_Dec_2007.pdf

Project Title: *Starting School Safely*

Chief Investigators: Sue Dockett, Bob Perry (CSU), Maureen Fegan (Macquarie)

Funding: NSW Roads and Traffic Authority

Aims of the Project: To:

1. identify issues and concerns about road safety as young children start school through discussions with children, families, educators, road safety consultants, out-of-school care staff, policy makers and local police;
2. analyse the data from these discussions, generating a questionnaire that can be distributed widely across NSW;
3. highlight the common road safety related issues and concerns, with a view to recommending the nature and type of resources that could address these; and
4. highlight the specific concerns of particular nominated communities, leading to recommendations at the local community level for responding to these.

Status of Project: Final report has been submitted.

Project Title: *Early childhood sustained home visiting: Outcomes at 4 years and the transition to school*

Chief Investigators: E. Harris. L. Kemp (UNSW); C. McMahon (Macquarie); G. Vimpani (Newcastle); T. Anderson, S. Matthey (Sydney South West Area Health Service); Sue Dockett, Bob Perry (CSU); V. Schmied (UWS)

Funding: ARC Discovery Grant, administered through UNSW for 2007-2011. The funds to come to CSU are for a 3-year full-time postgraduate stipend during 2008-2010.

Aims of the Project: The study aims to determine whether the gains made by children of 'at risk' mothers who reside in an Australian community characterized by profound socioeconomic disadvantage, and who have received a comprehensive sustained professional home visiting (SPHV) program from pregnancy up to child-age two, are maintained into the preschool years and the transition to school.

Status of Project: Some evidence to show that some child development measures are enhanced through SPHV. First group of children to transition to school are doing so in 2008. PhD student Cathy Kaplun has commenced study of the transition effects of SPHV.

Project Title: *Facilitating children's transition to school within families with complex support needs*

Chief Investigators: Sue Dockett, Bob Perry (CSU); Jan Mason (UWS)

Funding: ARC Linkages Grant with industry partners NSW Department of Community Services and Mission Australia

Aims of the Project: This project explores the experiences of families with complex support needs as young children from these families start school, and ways in which these families can be appropriately supported at this time of transition. Much has been researched and written about the significance of starting school, and how families play an important role in preparing children for school. Much less is known about the ways in which families support children as they start school or about the nature of supports that families require at this time. This is particularly so for families with complex support needs who, for a variety of reasons, may have limited or no access to early childhood services prior to their children starting school.

Status of Project: Project commenced in 2006 and is currently functioning well in a number of sites across NSW.

Project Title: *Continuity of Learning: Reconceptualising Reception*

Chief Investigators:

Phase 1 (2007): Bob Perry, Sue Dockett, Heather Campbell, Louise Hard, Richard Taffe (CSU)

Phase 2 (2008): Bob Perry, Sue Dockett (CSU)

Funding: South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services

Aims of the Project:

Phase 1 (2007): This project is the initial part of a proposed longitudinal study to be undertaken by DECS (with continuing assistance from CSU researchers) designed to reconceptualise the pedagogical practices in the first years of South Australian schools. As such, it is the beginning of a major reform project designed to arrest the current slide into neo-liberal and neo-conservative educational philosophies that has overtaken much of Australian early childhood education. This initial project will provide both theoretical and practical data on the feasibility of change to pedagogical approaches that honour the child and the families as well as the early childhood educator, rather than being unduly constrained by an outcomes-based, standards approach.

Phase 2 (2008): The project has been expanded to 13 early childhood networks across South Australia. The networks consist of 32 separate sites and approximately 80 early childhood educators from both preschools and schools. In each site, early childhood educators are establishing and seeking to answer inquiry questions about practice in the first year of school, particularly around transition to school. The CSU researchers have a role in the implementation of the project and are undertaking its evaluation.

Status of Project:

Phase 1 (2007):

Report completed, accepted and used to guide the development of Phase 2.

Phase 2 (2008):

Project is ongoing with final report due at the end of 2008.

THEME 2. CHILDREN'S VOICES IN RESEARCH

Project Title: *Listening to young children in museum spaces*

Chief Investigators: Sue Dockett, Bob Perry (CSU), Lynda Kelly, Sarah Main (Australian Museum)

Funding: 2006: UWS Internal Research Grant

Aims of the Project: To:

1. document young children's experiences, expectations and perspectives of a museum and museum spaces;
2. utilise innovative strategies and approaches to engage children in both verbal and non-verbal forms of consultation;
3. facilitate young children's reflection on their own experiences and understandings;
4. engage with young children in planning for future museum spaces; and
5. provide feedback to the children that incorporates opportunities for children to reflect upon and check the data and that indicates policy and practical changes to be made as a result of listening to children.

Status of Project: Completed.

Project Title: *Voices of children in transition to school*

Chief Investigators: Sue Dockett, Bob Perry (CSU)

Funding: 2006: Families NSW (formerly Families First)

Aims of the Project: To:

1. document ways in which early childhood educators and school teachers engaged with children as they planned transition to school programs;
2. celebrate the work of five schools and their associated prior-to-school settings in listening to children's voices as part of a research project;
3. utilise innovative strategies and approaches to engage children in both verbal and non-verbal forms of consultation; and
4. develop a final multi-media publication which highlights the voices of children in the project..

Status of Project: Project is completed. Evaluation interviews and celebratory events have been undertaken. Draft publication has been completed.

THEME 3. MATHEMATICS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Project Title: *Early Years Numeracy Project*

Chief Investigators: Bob Perry, Sue Dockett (CSU)

Funding: 2004-2007: South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services

2007: CSU Linkages Grant Development Fund

2008: South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services

Aiming from 2009 – 2011: ARC Linkages grant with South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services as industry partner

Aims of the Project: In 2004-2007, Bob Perry, Sue Dockett and Elspeth Harley (South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services) have been working with a small group of seven preschool teachers in South Australia to develop an approach to early childhood mathematics education and assessment that is innovative, effective and practical. This approach is designed to encourage preschool teachers to recognise and introduce powerful mathematical ideas to preschool children and to assess the development of these ideas in ways that are compatible with both the mandatory reporting regimes required by DECS and well-established early childhood practices of play- and child-based education.

The project is in 2008 in its first phase of 'scaling up' in two particular directions. The first is to spread the innovation into all government preschools in South Australia, and the second is to extend the ideas involved in the preschool project into the first years of school, thus enhancing the DECS approach to continuity of curriculum and pedagogy from preschool to school.

Status of Project: Reports and publications from the 2004-2007 project have been completed. The 2008 project is ongoing in 13 sites in South Australia. Linkages grant application is being developed and will be submitted in the second 2008 round.

Project Title: *Mathematical thinking of preschool children in rural and regional Australia: Research and practice*

Chief Investigators:

Dr Janette Bobis (University of Sydney)

Mr Brian Doig (Deakin University – Burwood)

Professor Lyn English (Queensland University of Technology)

Dr Robert Hunting (La Trobe University – Bendigo)

Associate Professor Judy Mousley (Deakin University – Waurin Ponds)

Associate Professor Joanne Mulligan (Macquarie University)

Dr Marina Papić (Macquarie University)

Ms Catherine Pearn (University of Melbourne)

Associate Professor Bob Perry (Charles Sturt University – Albury)

Dr Jill Robbins (Monash University – Peninsula)

Associate Professor Bob Wright (Southern Cross University)

Associate Professor Jenny Young-Loveridge (University of Waikato).

Funding: National Centre of Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Remote Australia (SiMERR)

Aims of the Project: The project has two major aims:

- **Carer Knowledge and Practice:** We will survey a representative sample of childcare workers, day care providers, preschool teachers and assistants, and trainers of childcare directors, teachers, and assistants, to assess beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge of mathematics as well as ways in which mathematical thinking is nurtured in the children in their care; and
- **Mapping of the Field:** Review current and on-going research in Australia and internationally that has a focus on the mathematical capacities and potential foundations for further mathematical development in children prior to formal schooling (0-5 years).

Data gained will serve as a knowledge base for designing appropriate training, professional development, and education programs for advancing young children's mathematical thinking.

Status of Project: Project is nearing completion.

THEME 4. CHILD CARE, FAMILIES, AND CHILDREN

Project Title: *Child Care Choices of Indigenous Families*

Research team: Tracey Simpson, Melissa Smith, Jo-Anne Reid, Laurie Crawford, Sophia Pearce, Servena McIntyre, Christine Fernando, Debra Walford, Alicia Artery, Letitia Smith, Loretta Stanley, Iris Reid, Cathy Davies, Jean Brain (Charles Sturt University), Jennifer Bowes, Roz Kitson, Michelle Doolan, Chantelle Davis, Natalie Burns (Macquarie University)

Funding: NSW Department of Community Services

Aims of the Project: The research team have developed a culturally appropriate methodology and community shaped method for collecting data. Research questions for the project include:

- What are the experiences of Indigenous families in NSW raising children under school age?
- What knowledge and skills do Indigenous children develop in the years prior to school and bring to their transition to school?
- What are the reasons for the low proportion of Indigenous children in NSW children's services and how can children's and family services be more effective for Indigenous families?

Topics of interest include:

- Level of interest in formal approaches to early childhood education
- Transition to school experiences
- What are the barriers to accessing early childhood education?
- What are the skills and interests in young children that are valued by families and developed in the prior to school years within families and communities?
- What alternative models of early childhood education might be more in tune with Indigenous values and practices?

Status of Project: commenced in 2004; to be completed in 2008. Sites for the research include remote, regional and metropolitan locations. Reports and presentations have been given to DoCS, Early Childhood Australia, Australian Research in Early Childhood Education, Australian Association of Research in Education and Australasian Human Development Association conferences.

Project Title: *Child Care Choices: The effects of multiple and changeable child care on children's development*

Chief Investigators: Professor Jennifer Bowes and Associate Professor Judy Ungerer (Macquarie University), Dr Linda Harrison and Ms Tracey Simpson (Charles Sturt University), Professor Ann Sanson (University of Melbourne), Ms Sarah Wise (Australian Institute of Family Studies)

Funding: Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage grant, with the NSW Department of Community Services as the Industry Partner

Aims of the Project: Thus project sought to:

1. describe families' use of government-funded (regulated) long day care and family day care, along with any additional care from friends, relatives and paid babysitters for children aged from birth to five years.
2. assess the impact of aspects of child care on children's social, emotional, behavioural, health and cognitive development, using a complex design that accounted for child, family and child care influences on children's development.

Status of Project: commenced in 2002; completed in 2004. A final report has been submitted to the ARC. Over 600 children aged from 6 months to 3 years were recruited through 70 long day care centres and family day care services in metropolitan and regional NSW. Over 70 child care centres and 650 families agreed to participate in the 3-year study. Data were collected annually via computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) with parents, parent questionnaires, carer questionnaires, observations of child care quality, and face-to-face child assessments. On-going funding was received from NSW Department of Community Services.

Project Title: *Child Care Choices - Extension to Age 8 Years*

Chief Investigators: Professor Jennifer Bowes, Associate Professor Judy Ungerer and Dr Catherine Neilsen-Hewitt (Macquarie University), Dr Linda Harrison and Ms Tracey Simpson (Charles Sturt University), Professor Ann Sanson (University of Melbourne), Ms Sarah Wise (Australian Institute of Family Studies)

Funding: NSW Department of Community Services

Aims of the Project: By extending the *Child Care Choices* study, this project will examine children's social, cognitive, health, behavioural, and academic outcomes in relation to their child care, preschool, and formal schooling experiences. An ecological design is employed, allowing these factors to be assessed in combination with child and family factors known to be important in explaining differences in children's development. The research questions are directly relevant to the provision of effective programs for children in the early childhood years:

- what are the links between children's adjustment and achievement in school and the quality of children's prior-to-school care and education experiences,

- what is the role of children's attachment relationships with their childcare providers and teachers over time in explaining adjustment and achievement,
- to what extent does a context of multiple and changeable childcare moderate any link between care, relationships, and child adjustment and achievement.

Status of Project: commenced in 2004; will be completed in 2008. In addition to the methods used in the *Child Care Choices* study, three intensive child assessments are conducted in the year before they enter school, the first year of school (Kindergarten) and Year 2. Observations of classroom quality are included at each of these assessment points. Teachers also complete a questionnaire describing children's academic achievement and social and emotional wellbeing, in each year of the study.

Project Title: *Sydney Family Development Project: Child care to school follow-up*

Chief Investigators: Dr Linda Harrison (Charles Sturt University), Associate Professor Judy Ungerer (Macquarie University)

Funding: research grants from Charles Sturt University, the University of Melbourne, Macquarie University, and Australian Government Department of Families and Community Services

Aims of the Project: This longitudinal study of families and their first-born children was designed to record families' use of non-parental child care from birth to the child's first year of school, and to assess the impact of child care on children's development at age 12 months, 2½ years, 6 years and 12 years. A complex design was employed to account for child, family, child care, and classroom influences on children's development. A particular focus was on the role of child-parent and child-teacher relationship quality in explaining aspects of children's adjustment to school.

Status of Project: Families were recruited during the first pregnancy, with follow-up assessments at 4, 16 and 36 months. School-age data were collected in Kindergarten and Year 6 of school (1994 to 2005). Findings to age 6 years have been reported at conferences and in international journals. Findings to age 12 years have been reported at conferences and are currently being written up for publication.

Project Title: *Growing Up in Australia, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)* www.aifs.gov.au/growingup.

Chief Investigators:

Professor J. Ainley (Australian Council for Educational Research), Associate Professor D. Berthelsen (Queensland University of Technology), Professor M. Bittman (University of New England), **Dr L. Harrison** (Charles Sturt University), Professor I. Katz (Social Policy Research Centre, U New South Wales), Associate Professor J. Nicholson (Murdoch Children's Research Institute), Professor B. Rogers (National Centre for Epidemiology & Public Health, ANU), Professor A. Sanson (University of Melbourne), Professor M. Sawyer (University of Adelaide), Professor S. Silburn (Institute for Child Health Research, Curtin University), Dr L. Strazdins (National Centre for Epidemiology & Public Health, ANU), Associate Professor J. Ungerer (Macquarie University), Professor G. Vimpani (University of Newcastle), Professor M. Wake (Murdoch Children's Research Institute), Professor S. Zubrick (Institute for Child Health Research, Curtin University).

Funding: Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Aims of the Project: LSAC was designed to answer a number of broad questions:

- how well are children doing on key developmental outcomes?
- how are child outcomes interlinked with their wider circumstances and environment?
- in what ways do features of the environment (eg., families, communities, institutions such as childcare and school) impact on child outcomes?
- how is a child's potential maximised to achieve positive outcomes for children, their families, and society?
- what role can government play in achieving these outcomes?

Status of Project: The study began in 2004 with the recruitment of a nationally representative sample of 5000 infants (aged 6-12 months) and 5000 children (aged 4½ to 5-years). Main rounds of data collection occur every two years (2004, 2006, 2008, 2010) and include interviews with the families, parent questionnaires, child assessments conducted in the child's home, and mail-out questionnaires to child care providers and teachers. The data set also includes linked data to the National Child Care Accreditation Council. Supplementary data are collected in alternate years via a mail-back questionnaire.

LSAC is providing an important source of data on families' use of child care and early education. Wave 1 data for infants showed similar patterns across the States/Territories: 35% were attending regular child care, most commonly being provided by a relative (49%) followed by child care centres (28%). For the 4 to 5-year-old cohort, type of child care/early education varied across States/Territories particularly in relation to preschool attendance. Rates were highest in states that have more pre-school facilities attached to schools, and lowest in NSW where pre-schools and child care tend to be provided by community-based or private settings. Less than 5% of 4 to 5 year olds were not attending child care, pre-school or school, but this small group was doing less well on early tests of literacy and numeracy.

Project Title: *What is life like for babies and toddlers in childcare? Understanding the 'lived experience' of infants through an innovative mosaic methodology*

Chief Investigators: Professor Jennifer Sumsion, Dr Linda Harrison, Ms Fran Press, Associate Professor Sharynne McLeod, Professor Ben Bradley (Charles Sturt University), Dr Joy Goodfellow

Funding: aiming for 2008-2010 ARC Linkage Project with the National Family Day Care Association and KU Children's Services

Aims of the Project:

1. to generate insights into infants' experiences of formal childcare
2. to describe the quality of life for infants in formal childcare
3. to develop ways to extend the 'Mosaic Approach' methodology (Clark & Moss, 2001) to research with pre-linguistic infants.

Status of Project: Funding to commence July 2008.

THEME 5. QUALITY IN LONG DAY CARE

Project Title: *A multi-modal investigation of current and proposed structures and processes determining and sustaining quality in Australian centre-based child care*

Chief Investigators: Dr Linda Harrison, Ms Fran Press, Professor Jennifer Sumsion
Dr Marianne Fenech (Charles Sturt University) and Professor Jennifer Bowes
(Macquarie University)

Funding: 2008-2010 ARC Discovery Project

Aims of the Project: The study will address two critical questions: *How to ensure the provision of high quality centre-based child care?* and *How to sustain quality over time?* by examining two factors identified by the OECD (2001) as crucial to ensuring and sustaining quality: (1) the effectiveness of external legislated requirements and (2) internal processes and practices within child care services. The research will optimise the use of existing sources of data, the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* and *Child Care Choices*, through linking these to the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) data base. These broad data sets will be complemented and extended by in depth qualitative case studies of services identified as high quality, and collaborative engagement with critical communities of practitioners.

Status of Project: Project has commenced

Project Title: *Practice potentials. Impact of participation in professional support activities on quality outcomes in early childhood*

Chief Investigators: Dr Linda Harrison, Ms Fran Press, Ms Carol Burgess (Charles Sturt University), Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake, Dr Katey De Gioia, Ms Sandra Cheeseman (Macquarie University)

Funding: Professional Support Coordination Alliance

Aims of the Project: This project is designed to:

- provide a broad national picture of the links between staff participation in professional development and support programs and quality outcomes for long day care centres;
- develop an understanding of how children's services managers view the value of professional support and their understanding of the relationship between professional support and development and quality outcomes;
- develop an understanding of the range of measures that are effective in supporting services to implement improvements/changes in practice through in depth study of services experiences;
- explore possible links between participation in professional development strategies and achieving identified outcomes.

A national study of over 500 long day care directors/centre managers has been conducted through an on-line survey. These data have been complemented by focus group interviews with Directors/Managers and in-depth case studies of high quality services in each State and Territory.

Status of Project: Final report has been submitted and accepted. Publications arising from the study are underway.

Project Title: *Influences on politicians' policy decision making in early childhood education and care in Australia*

Chief Investigator: Kathryn Bown (Supervisors Jennifer Sumsion & Frances Press)

Funding: Australian Post Doctoral Award

Aims of the Project: This project uses a three-phase methodology: interviews with politicians; document analysis of policy texts; and two key case studies on a NSW state issue and a federal level issue, to explore the following key issues:

1. What are politicians' understandings and beliefs around the role of early childhood education and care in contemporary Australian society?
2. What are politicians' understandings of quality, curriculum, teacher qualifications, and teacher and staff pay and working conditions, and how did they come to have these understandings?
3. Do politicians' personal beliefs, gender, upbringing and values influence their decisions for ECEC policy?
4. Do official political media (media releases, speeches, official photographs, websites, commissioned biographies etc) give us an indication of how politicians are influenced for ECEC policy?
5. Why are some discourses/ constructs taken up and some not taken up by politicians to inform policy in ECEC?
6. Which groups have greater access to policy decision making processes and which do not? Why?
7. What do key ECEC professionals believe to be the most influential people/circumstances in ECEC policy processes?

Status of Project: Data collection has begun and will conclude by March 2009. The first of several planned journal article reporting on the study has been submitted.

THEME 6. CHILDREN WITH SPEECH IMPAIRMENT

Project Title: *Sound effects. Children with speech impairment: A population study of prevalence, severity, impact and service provision*

Chief Investigators: Associate Professor Sharynne McLeod, Dr Linda Harrison, Associate Professor Lindy McAllister (CSU)

Funding: Australian Research Council Discovery Grant

Aims of the Project: Early intervention can ameliorate speech impairment in children. However, education and health services for these children are limited and differ across states and rural-urban regions. This study will ascertain the interrelationship between a) prevalence and b) severity of speech impairment in Australian children with the c) availability of services and the d) impact of speech impairment on 250 affected children and their families in NSW and Victoria. To understand the social, economic and educational impact of speech impairment, data from children participating in this study will be matched with 5000 children in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

Status of Project: Funding is for 2007-2009. Data collection is underway.