

Transition to school practices: Comparisons from Iceland and Australia

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Abstract

This paper is the result of collaboration among early childhood education researchers from different cultures on opposite sides of the globe. The project sought to identify what practitioners in both preschool and primary school settings in Iceland and Australia regarded as successful transition to school practices.

Independently developed surveys of these practitioners, both based on earlier work in the USA, gathered data on what the practitioners identified as ‘good ideas’ in transition practices. There were similarities across the countries: popular practices included children visiting primary schools prior to the start of the school year and informational meetings for parents. There were also differences: Icelandic primary school teachers were, for instance, more likely than Australian teachers to write to their prospective students before they started school.

Key words: Transition to school, Iceland, Australia, teachers’ perspectives

Introduction

The importance of transition to school is recognized in many different contexts around the world. The project reported in this paper developed as it became clear that the research questions being asked in Iceland and Australia were quite similar despite the considerable differences in educational contexts.

The Icelandic educational system is divided into four levels. The first level is playschool (*leikskóli*), which is intended for children 6 years old and under. Children are not required to attend playschool; but according to legislation, all children must have the opportunity to do so. Approximately 90 % of children aged 3 to 5 and almost all 5 year olds attend playschools (Hagstofa Íslands, 2006). The second level, compulsory school (*grunnskóli*), is intended for children from 6 to 16 years old. Children start primary school in the fall of the year they turn 6 years old. Although playschools are not compulsory, both playschools and primary schools in Iceland are defined as educational institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, which publishes national curricula for these school levels. According to Icelandic laws on playschools and primary schools and the *National Curriculum Guidelines* for both school levels, playschools and primary schools should work to enhance continuity between school levels and establish cooperation between these sectors (*Laws on primary schools, no. 66, 1995; Laws on playschools, no.78, 1994; Menntamálaráðuneytið, 1999a, 1999b*).

In Australia, both early childhood services and primary school education fall under state and territory legislation. Consequently, provision in both of these areas differs among states and territories. The Australian context relevant to this paper is that of the most populous state – New South Wales (NSW). In NSW, the school year runs from the end of January to December and there is only one intake into the first year of primary school – Kindergarten – at the beginning of the school year. Children can commence primary school at the beginning of the year in which they turn 5, providing they have their 5th birthday by July 31 in this year. They must be attending primary school by the time they are 6 years old. Hence, it is possible that there will be children aged between 4 years 6 months and 6 years starting primary school in the same class at the beginning of the school year. Primary schools in NSW are responsible to the Minister of Education and work from state legislated syllabuses (see <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au>). Preschool settings such as preschools or child care centres – with a few exceptions – are responsible to a different minister and are guided by a curriculum framework (NSW Department of Community Services, 2002). Not all children

attend preschool settings in the year before starting primary school: of those who do, some attend for one or two sessions each week, and some children attend multiple settings. (These arrangements vary quite dramatically across cultural and socio-economic contexts.)

To enable us to use consistent language in this paper to describe the prior-to-school and early primary school experiences of children, we have chosen to standardize our terminology as follows:

preschool is used to denote all settings experienced by children in the year prior to the first year of formal schooling – in Iceland, these settings are leikskóli and in NSW they could be called preschools, child care or family day care;

first year of school is used to denote the first year of formal primary school – in Iceland, this year is called first grade and in NSW it is called Kindergarten.

While there are cross-national differences apparent between Iceland and NSW, there are also similarities, particularly in the ways in which the preschool settings differ from the primary school settings. In both countries, the preschool and primary school settings have different histories and philosophies, and the curricula and teaching methods are different. These differences can, for example, be noted in the different vocabulary and discourses of these institutions. For instance, in both Icelandic and NSW preschools, the concepts of caregiving and well-being are part of the discourse of teaching and learning, while teaching and methods are the concepts of the primary schools. In Icelandic and NSW preschool settings, play is an important concept, while lessons and subjects are part of the primary school language. Further, in both Iceland and NSW, the physical structure of the two levels is different: for example, primary schools are housed in bigger buildings, and primary school classrooms are different from the small rooms in the preschools. The number of children in each class is larger in the primary schools, and there are usually fewer adults with whom children develop relationships. This echoes Pianta's (2004) summary of the transition process as one where the demands increase and the support decreases.

Theoretical background

The transition to school marks a significant change in the ways a child participates in the family and community. As children start primary school, their roles, identities and expectations change. So do the expectations of others, the patterns of interaction and the relationships around and including children. But the transition to primary school is not just a

change for children. There are changes for all involved, including educators (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

Ecological models of transition have been used to help understand the complexity of this (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002; Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1999). Ecological models of transition to school emphasize interaction among the different worlds of children and place responsibility for an effective transition to school with all involved in the process. This broad view of transition recognizes that there are many contributors to transition experiences and that the perspectives and expectations of each contributor shape those experiences in some way. It promotes a view of transition to school programs as opportunities for building meaningful and responsive relationships. These relationships both provide the bridge between preschool and primary school experiences and form the basis for ongoing interactions among children, families and schools. Teachers are key contributors in the transition to school.

Continuity between educational programs is often seen as an important element of transition to school. For instance, Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi (1994) encourage continuity between preschools and primary schools by working towards a common vision of these institutions: (1) for the child, as co-constructer of knowledge, identity, and culture; (2) for the role of the teacher; and (3) for pedagogical practice. Similarly, Kagan (1991) has proposed that continuity has three major properties: philosophical or dealing with underlying values and beliefs; continuity in pedagogy, meaning that the content and process of instruction and disciplinary principles must remain along similar lines; and structural continuity, where different components of early childhood education should be acknowledged, and where educators strive for agreement. Broström (2002) too emphasizes continuity in children's lives as they move from preschool to primary school, focusing particularly on teachers' practices.

In this study, comparisons are made among the transition practices of early childhood educators in both preschool and primary school settings in Iceland and NSW using an ecological model of transition as the basis of analysis.

Teachers' Transition Practices

Teacher beliefs about what is important as children start school and what makes a successful transition are reflected in their transition practices. The results from a survey in the US revealed that use of some practices related to the transition into school were nearly universal (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). The most frequently reported practices were those that took place after the start of school and/or those that involved low-intensity, generic

contact such as flyers, brochures, and group open houses. The most frequently reported practice, talking with the child's parent after school started, was employed by 95% of the sample. Practices that involved direct contact with children or families were among the least frequently reported, as were practices that involved contacting children or families before the start of school. Barriers to using more individualized transition practices included class size, not knowing which children would be in a specific class, and the fact that teachers were not paid over summer, which was the time they would have to contact families (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001). The practices that were most frequently reported to be "a good idea" were talking with parents after school started, reading written records about children's progress and sending parents a letter either after or before school started.

Broström's (2002) study on transition practices in Denmark used a translated version of the US survey and showed that the most frequently reported practices that were considered to be good ideas by preschool teachers (pedagoge), primary school teachers (lærere) and kindergarten teachers were: the school inviting the child to visit the class before school starts; the preschool teachers and children visiting the kindergarten class before school starts; and the primary school teacher having some period of teaching time in preschool class. Practices that involved home visits to the children were among the least frequently reported as good ideas. The results reveal some hesitation on the part of participants regarding collaboration on curriculum and teaching methods. Only 60% of participants judged practices that had to do with coordination of the curriculum or teaching to be good ideas. Preschool teachers were less positive about transition activities involving reading each other's documents, having shared meetings on educational practices, and coordination of the curriculum. However, they assigned a high priority to having shared meetings with preschools, preschool classes, and parents before school started.

Method

The US *Teacher Transition Practices* questionnaire developed by Pianta and colleagues was adapted for use with Icelandic and NSW preschool and primary school teachers (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1996; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Given the disparate contexts of Iceland and Australia, the use of questionnaires provided access the beliefs and practices of groups of teachers in preschool and the early years of school on a set of comparable questions. While recognizing the limitations of survey research, such as the focus on self-reports of practice, challenges with response rates and the use of a

range of closed, rather than open-ended questions, the surveys enabled researchers to construct a snapshot of practices at a given time and to use this as a basis for determining future research foci among the different groups. The questionnaires used in Iceland and Australia had some differences, reflecting the different social and educational contexts. While this could be seen as a limitation, the importance of designing questionnaires that made sense within each context was a priority.

The Icelandic part of the study was conducted in Reykjavík. All preschools and primary schools were asked to participate in the study. The questionnaire was translated into Icelandic by two independent translators and piloted with a group of early childhood educators. The Danish version of the questionnaire (Broström, 2002) was also taken into consideration when preparing the Icelandic questionnaire. Ultimately two versions were constructed, one for the preschool teachers, and one for the first year of school teachers.

The questionnaire consisted of 32 similar questions for both groups, and 18 extra questions for the first grade teachers. The questionnaire started with questions on background information on the schools and the participating teachers, followed by questions on the teachers' views on children's readiness for school. They were asked 11 questions on the typical number of children that have problems when starting school and the areas in which the problems occurred. The next section of the questionnaire asked teachers to identify which of 16 transition practices they had used that particular year with their class or individual children and to judge whether each practice was a "good idea." They were also asked about the barriers they found in implementing the transition practices. The additional questions for the first grade teachers were on the transition practices used in the first year of school to ease children's adjustment to school.

The questionnaires were sent to 72 preschool directors and 31 primary school principals, and they were asked to deliver the questionnaire, a cover letter, and a reply paid envelope to the relevant teachers. Responses were received from teachers in 28 primary schools (90% response rate) and 64 preschools (89% response rate).

The NSW context for this study was Wollongong – the fourth largest city in the state. The population is highly multicultural and displays among its families a wide range of socio-economic circumstances.

The US *Teacher Transition Practices* questionnaire provided the basis for the NSW surveys with additional items derived from ongoing work of the *Starting School Research Project* (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Separate questionnaires were prepared for primary school and preschool settings. However, the overall format for the two questionnaires was the same,

beginning with some demographic data collection about the educational setting and the respondent. The third section of each questionnaire consisted of statements describing a transition activity (19 statements for primary schools, 17 for preschool settings) with respondents asked to specify whether they had participated in such a practice in the previous year and to indicate which of the activities they saw as “very useful” for transitioning children and families. The fourth section of the questionnaire consisted of five open-ended questions that asked respondents to identify what they thought were the most useful and least useful transition activities, what other activities they would like to see implemented and what were their goals in implementing transition to school activities. The final question sought any other thoughts that the respondents might want to convey about transition to school.

Written surveys were posted to each of the 52 government primary schools in the district and to 40 preschool settings that sent children to some of these schools. The surveys were completed anonymously during the first term of the school year and returned in a reply paid envelope. The analysis reported here is based on 46 completed questionnaires from primary school teachers (response rate of 88%) and 26 from preschool educators (response rate of 65%).

Summary of Results

The following tables show an analysis of responses from Iceland and NSW on the questions about transition practices and their perceived usefulness that were common to the surveys in both countries. Clearly there are similarities and differences across the two countries that will be discussed in the next section of the paper.

TABLE 1 HERE

Most common practices

The most commonly used transitional practice reported by both Icelandic preschool and primary school teachers was having preschool children visit the primary school prior to the start of the new school year. These visits are usually planned by the preschools in cooperation with the primary schools and in most cases the preschool teachers go with the children to the school. The second most common transition practice used by both preschool and primary school teachers was an invitation from the primary school for the preschool children to participate in events in the primary school. In some cases, the preschool teachers

and the primary school teachers visited each others' classrooms, although it was not a common practice

For primary school teachers in NSW, the most commonly used transitional practices were informational meetings with parents and meetings with children before school started. In the NSW context, these meetings are generally held in the last term of the year before the children started school and vary from one session of perhaps two hours through to extended child involvement of at least one day per week for ten weeks. Hence, they could be held up to four months before the children actually commenced their schooling. Although not canvassed in Table 1, it is also quite common for preschool teachers to be involved in information sessions for the parents, held at the preschools and organized by the preschool teachers.

In the NSW context, it is also quite common for written records about children to be sent to schools. This does not happen automatically and must be sanctioned by parents but most teachers in the survey (76.2% of preschool teachers and 51.4% of school teachers) indicated that they had been involved in such practices. How the records are used in the schools is a question worth asking.

In Iceland, meetings of preschool and primary school teachers to discuss individual children were mainly concerning certain groups of children, such as children with special needs, as was the case when written records about children's experiences and status followed them into the primary school. This was not a general practice for all children. A more common practice to facilitate the adjustment of children to school was an individual meeting with each child before school started. Many primary school teachers sent a letter to each child before the start of school (67.9%). These letters were usually mailed a few days before school started to welcome the children to school and invite them and their parents to meet the teacher. However, a more common practice, which is not reported in Table 1 because it was not a practice in NSW, was to send these letters to the child's parents before school started (90.6%).

Generally, preschool and school teachers in NSW as well as in Iceland do not meet to discuss individual children's needs except in the case of the highly structured approach taken to the transition to school for children with special needs. In NSW, formal transition teams consisting of parents, school personnel, district special education personnel, preschool teacher and other support personnel are created and work together, sometimes over more than twelve months, to ensure a successful transition to school for the child and their family.

As in Iceland, many preschool teachers in NSW organize visits to primary schools to help children make the adjustment to school. These generally focus on children finding out

what school looks like, what children do at school, and meeting some key adults (perhaps the first year of school teacher for the following year) and children (such as the current first year of school children) in the school.

Less common practices

.It was not common for Icelandic teachers to hold informational meetings for all parents before school started. However, most primary teachers (96.2%) reported that they held informational meetings for all parents in the first few days after school had started.

Approximately 81% of the primary school teachers reported that they facilitated contacts between parents of children in their classroom. The least frequent practices that the teachers reported were a call to the child's home after school starts (4%) and no one reported visiting the child's home. (Again, these practices are not reported in Table 1 as they were not canvassed in the responses from NSW teachers.)

Few NSW school teachers are involved with preschool teachers in discussions about curriculum and pedagogical continuity across the transition to school. Hence, it is surprising that 28.6% of preschool teachers responding to the survey have indicated their involvement in such a practice. However, there may be some local contextual reasons for this apparent discrepancy, with a range of informal meetings based on local contacts across preschools and schools known to have occurred in the Wollongong area.

Similarly, it is not common for teachers in the two sectors across NSW to observe each others' practice. While the survey results suggest that primary school teachers visit preschools quite often, the purpose of these visits is likely to be organizational or promotional rather than an effort to develop the professionals' knowledge of each others' practice.

Other transition practices indicated by the NSW primary school teachers to be used rarely were the writing of letters to children who had not yet started school and school children returning to their previous preschool setting to share their experiences about school. While the latter of these practices was indicated by more preschool teachers to be used, it is likely that it happened incidentally and not in a planned fashion.

TABLE 2 HERE

The results show that the participants in both Iceland and NSW generally expressed a positive attitude toward the transition activities they had used.

Iceland

The most often mentioned good practice for both Icelandic preschool and primary school teachers was the visit by preschool children and their teachers to the primary school prior to the children starting school.

The second most common good practice mentioned by the preschool teachers was shared meetings of preschool and primary school teachers to discuss education and continuity in children's education. These shared meetings were also frequently mentioned by the primary school teachers, but more of them saw them as difficult to implement. A large portion of the preschool teachers reported that they thought visits by the preschool teachers to the primary school to observe the educational practice to be a good practice, as were invitations from the primary school to have preschool children participate in events in the primary school. This participation in events was also seen as important by the primary school teachers.

A greater percentage of primary school than preschool teachers reported as important "Meetings of preschool teachers and primary school teachers about individual children's life and development" and "Written records about individual children's experiences and status follow them to the primary school". This could relate to the primary teacher seeking specific information about children who will be in their class in the new school year.

When the two tables are compared it becomes evident that more teachers reported transition activities to be a good idea than actually used these activities. For instance, although it was not a common practice for the teachers to observe each others' classrooms many of them (more than 70%) reported that it would be a good idea to do so. Similarly although not many of them reported that they held shared meetings to discuss education and continuity in children's education 81% of the preschool teachers and 61% of primary school teachers reported it to be a good idea.

The least endorsed practice mentioned by both preschool and primary school teachers in Iceland was, "The preschool teacher follows the children to first grade, and teaches some lessons there". The NSW teachers were not asked to comment on this practice as it is very rarely possible in their context.

New South Wales

For both preschool and primary school teachers, having the children visit the primary school before they started school was seen to be a very useful practice. For primary school teachers, even more useful were the practices of meeting with the children before school started and holding informational meetings for parents before school started. In almost every case, more teachers from both sectors reported that practices were very useful than reported

using these practices. This may reflect some of the constraints on teachers that will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

More preschool than primary school teachers reported the transfer of written records from preschool to school as a very useful practice. It is interesting to note that almost half of the primary school teachers did not see this practice as very useful.

The perceived usefulness of the practice of primary school teachers writing a letter to children before they started school was seen by NSW school teachers as much greater than their involvement would suggest it might be. Similarly, having children in the first year of their schooling return to their preschool to share their experience has received a strong endorsement from many primary school teachers who have not reported using the practice themselves.

Very few current transition practices were identified by either preschool or primary school teachers as being less than useful. Examples unique to NSW and therefore not reported in Table 2 were, from school teachers, parent surveys and from preschool teachers, short orientation programs and primary school teachers talking to parents.

Discussion

Trying to make meaningful comparisons across national, cultural and linguistic boundaries is often fraught with difficulty and challenge. Even if the linguistic challenges have been met through careful translation of instruments and cross-checking through techniques such as back-translation, any comparisons need to be made carefully and with as great as possible an understanding of the contexts in which the various studies have taken place.

As indicated previously, there are also challenges in the use of questionnaires to access practices and beliefs. While there was generally high response rate across the Icelandic and New South Wales contexts, we are aware that the data reported cannot be claimed to be representative of all teachers in these contexts. The use of questions requiring a closed (yes/no) response can also limit the nature and extent of information provided by respondents (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Despite these challenges, the use of questionnaires in this project enabled the researchers to access a large number of people in quite different contexts, and obtain a 'snapshot' of current transition practices. As well as offering the basis for international comparisons, the snapshot has provided a starting point for ongoing discussions with teachers on both contexts and informed other research in the same area (see for example,

Dockett & Perry, 2004, 2007; Einarsdóttir, 2003). The inclusion of a range of open-ended questions also provides some opportunity for respondents to add detailed information, or explanation about different aspects of transition.

One of the greatest values in making cross-national comparisons is not what they say about the differences or similarities among the countries and systems being studied but, rather, that they provide an alternative lens through which each of the countries and systems can be observed.

An alternative lens can highlight:

- different interpretations of the same practices;
- reflection on what is important in transition to school and how this can be incorporated into practice;
- reflection on practices in each context—often focusing on the practices of others is a less threatening starting point for reflexive practice than examining one’s own practice;
- the importance of context; and
- consideration of ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ perspectives with the expectation that there are multiple perspectives on similar issues and practices.

While we are interested in differences and similarities in transition practices undertaken by teachers in Iceland and Australia, we are actually more interested in how we might improve these practices in both countries, to the benefit of the children starting school in both.

From Table 1, it is clear that there is a number of similarities in transition practices in the two countries. For example, most teachers in both preschool and primary school in both countries were involved in the practices of preschool children visiting the primary school before school starts. However, even within these similarities, there are differences between the two contexts. For example, in Iceland, such visits are usually organized by the preschool teachers with the children being accompanied by their preschool teacher to the local primary school. This may occur a number of times in the year before the children start school. Generally, parents are not involved in such visits. While the Icelandic primary school teachers are involved in this practice, they usually do not instigate nor organize it. In NSW, such preschool teacher organized visits do occur but by far the most common way in which preschool children visit the primary school before they start school is as part of a primary school organized orientation or transition program. Generally, the children would be brought to the school by a parent and the preschool teachers would not be involved. This is an

excellent example of where a survey question may be responded to similarly by different groups of teachers but their responses may mean quite different things.

Another example of a seeming similarity might help reinforce the care with which one needs to interpret cross-national results. The practice *Children in the first year of school visit the preschool to share their experiences about school* is used by relatively few teachers in any of the four cohorts. However, 27.3% of the preschool teachers in NSW have indicated their use of the practice, well above the results for the other cohorts of teachers. This result needs to be interpreted carefully by realizing that many older siblings of current preschool children accompany their parent / carer to collect a younger sibling from preschool because of distance and child safety issues. Some of the preschool teachers may be suggesting that such informal contact with the preschool constitutes “visiting the preschool”. While some preschools in NSW do have formal “Back to Preschool” parties, this is not the norm. On the other hand, their number is increasing, suggesting that preschool teachers see such a practice as a good idea.

Interesting differences occur in the level of response from teachers in the two countries on the item “Primary school teacher visits the preschool”. It would appear that this practice is perceived to be used much less often in Iceland than in NSW, even though a large proportion of both Icelandic and NSW preschool and primary teachers seem to think that the practice is a good idea / very useful. However, there are two important contextual aspects that must be considered when addressing these apparent discrepancies.

In the first, it is important to address the likely reason for the visits. In Iceland, the visits are most likely to be for purposes of gathering information about individual children or groups of children or to observe preschool practices. They can be difficult to organize because of the challenges surrounding having primary school teachers released from their normal duties in order to visit the preschools. In NSW, while some of the visits may involve such practices, more likely reasons for visits of primary school teachers to preschools are to provide promotional information to the preschools and their parents on the virtues of sending children to particular schools. In Iceland, there is virtually no competition among schools for clientele, with most children attending their neighbourhood government school. There are very few private schools and, so, little reason for primary schools to advertise their perceived strengths to future clients. The situation is quite different in NSW, especially in urban areas such as Wollongong. More than 40% of primary aged children in NSW are educated in non-government schools, including a large number in systemic Catholic schools. This percentage has risen over the last 10 years, partly because of advertising from the schools. Government

schools are zoned into neighbourhoods but even then, parents do “shop around” among the government schools for the ones that they perceive to have a better educational reputation. Hence, there is a situation where schools are competing for future numbers. One way in which many schools do this is by sending teachers to provide information and promote their schools in the preschools. This could be one reason why the percentages on this item from NSW are greater than those from Iceland.

Almost all school teachers from both Iceland and NSW see “Informational meetings for all parents held before school starts” as a good idea / very useful. However, while 90% of NSW school teachers used this practice, only 27.5% of Icelandic school teacher did. How can such a large difference be explained?

Firstly, there are some scheduling differences between the situations in Iceland and NSW: in Iceland, there is a 3-month gap between the end of one school year and the start of the next. In NSW, this gap is only 6 weeks. Secondly, the issue of competition among schools again is important: schools in NSW work very hard to help parents make early decisions about their choice of school so that the schools have information about student numbers and, as a consequence, staff numbers for the following year well before the end of the previous school year. These decisions are then cemented in the parents’ minds through matters such as the purchase of school uniforms as well as, in some circumstances, larger decisions such as where the family will live so as to best facilitate access to the school of their choice.

As a consequence of these and other matters, most NSW primary schools see it as very important to provide information to parents about the schools quite early in the year before the children start school. Sometimes, this can be as early as 6 months before the end of the school year. In fact, in some communities – and Wollongong is one of these – schools in a geographical area may combine to hold an information meeting for parents at a local community centre in order to provide parents with as much information as possible on the choice of schools available to them in their local area.

On the other hand, Icelandic primary schools generally see no reason for such early information sessions with parents and instead devote the first few days of the new school year to individual meetings with the first year of school children and their parents. At these meetings, information similar to that given in NSW meetings, such as timetables, equipment lists, classes and teachers and ways in which parents can be involved in the school is provided. Again, this provides an excellent example of how fraught with difficulty cross-national studies can be. Strictly speaking, these meetings in Icelandic schools are held after school starts for the teachers but before school starts for the children who commence their

classes a day or two after the individual meetings. The meetings serve much the same purposes in both Iceland and NSW but take place at quite different times in the children's transition to school.

Whatever differences, or similarities, are discussed, cognizance of the contexts needs to be detailed and comprehensive. It is quite likely that there are some common reasons across the two contexts for differences between the responses of preschool and primary teachers such as different curricula and expectations in the two sectors, regulations governing the educational provisions of each and the potential for a professional gap to exist between preschool and school teachers. However, in practice, local contextual differences are often more important than these and need to be considered.

Conclusion

The results from this comparison highlight some challenges both within each country context, as well as across the contexts. For example, in each context teachers highlighted the importance of continuity between preschool and early school experiences for children, as evidenced by their focus on the importance of preschool children visiting the primary school. There was much less focus on continuity in curriculum and teaching practice. While teachers regarded continuity across these areas as a good idea, their involvement in practices that promoted curriculum and teaching continuity was irregular. Responses to open-ended questions suggest a number of reasons for this, including issues of time, resources and the difficulties of cross-institutional interaction. They also reiterate the findings of other research (Dockett & Perry, 2004) that communication between and among teachers in preschool and school settings is often not based on professional respect and trust.

While teachers in different settings indicated commitment to a range of transition practices and identified others as good ideas, there remained a sense that these were the responsibility of others. One of the key directions to emerge from this study has been the importance of working with teachers in preschool and school settings to identify current practice and to investigate ways to build upon this, with teachers in both settings 'owning' the process of change. Sometimes the stimulus for change needs to come from outside the context as different lenses are adopted to review not only the practices of others, but our own practice as well.

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Table 1: Percentage of preschool and primary school teachers reporting use of transition practices common to both Iceland and NSW.

Transition Activities	Icelandic Preschool Teachers	Icelandic Primary School Teachers	Australian Preschool Teachers	Australian Primary School Teachers
1. Preschool children visit the primary school before school starts	76.0	72.0	55.0	75.0
2. Primary school invites the preschool children to participate in events in the primary school	56.0	45.3	30.0	31.3
3. Preschool teacher visits the primary school to observe the educational practice	30.6	25.5	45.0	13.3
4. Primary school teacher visits the preschool	23.1	19.6	52.2	40.6
5. Meetings of preschool teachers and primary school teachers about individual children's lives and development	36.8	34.0	63.6	42.9
6. Preschool teachers and primary school teachers held shared meetings to discuss education and continuity in children's education	18.9	19.4	28.6	6.9
7. Children in the first year of school visit the preschool to share their experiences about school	11.2	18.7	27.3	13.3
8. Written records about individual children's experiences and status follow them to the primary school	56.8	81.1	76.2	51.4
9. A letter to the child sent before school starts		67.9		23.3
10. A meeting with the child before school starts		92.6		80.0
11. Informational meeting for all parents held before school starts		27.5		90.2

Table 2: Percentage of Preschool- and Primary School Teachers Judging Transition Practices common to both Iceland and NSW to be Good Idea/Very Useful.

Transition Activities	Icelandic Preschool Teachers	Icelandic Primary School Teachers	Australian Preschool Teachers	Australian Primary School Teachers
1. Preschool children visit the primary school before school starts	95.1	92.7	76.9	77.4
2. Primary school invites the preschool children to participate in events in the primary school	77.8	71.8	50.0	80.0
3. Preschool teacher visits the primary school to observe the educational practice	78.8	70.0	55.6	50.0
4. Primary school teacher visits the preschool	74.1	61.9	78.6	64.3
5. Meetings of preschool teachers and primary school teachers about individual children's lives and development	75.0	92.5	55.6	70.6
6. Preschool teachers and primary school teachers held shared meetings to discuss education and continuity in children's education	81.5	61.0	87.5	75.0
7. Children in the first year of school visit the preschool to share their experiences about school	75.0	64.3	33.3	80.0
8. Written records about individual children's experiences and status follow them to the primary school	74.1	92.3	66.7	55.6
9. A letter to the child sent before school starts		86.0		85.7
10. A meeting with the child before school starts		96.4		87.1
11. Informational meeting for all parents held before school starts		94.7		94.6

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