

This article is downloaded from



<http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au>

It is the paper published as:

Author: S. Dockett, T. Mason and B. Perry

Title: Successful transition to school for Australian Aboriginal children

Journal: Childhood Education ISSN: 0009-4056

Year: 2006

Volume: 82

Issue: 3

Pages: 139-144

Abstract: Aboriginal people have been described as the most educationally disadvantaged group of people within Australia (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1995). Their participation rates at all levels of education are lower than those of non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1992, 1997). Many Aboriginal students continue to be affected by poverty (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1999) and suffer health problems, including otitis media, that adversely affect their school learning (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Compared with non-Indigenous Australians, Australian Aborigines have higher levels of infant mortality, more infectious diseases, and a life expectancy that is likely to be 15 to 20 years lower (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997, 2002).

Author Address: sdockett@csu.edu.au. aubperry@csu.edu.au

URL: <http://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx>

http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/resources/item.cfm?item_id=190&group_type=BB&group_id=2&q=&start=122

http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=12759&local_base=GEN01-CSU01

http://unilinc20.unilinc.edu.au:80/F/?func=direct&doc_number=000097607&local_base=L25X
X

CRO Number: 12759

Transition to School for Aboriginal Children. What's It Take?

Terry Mason

Bob Perry
University of Western Sydney

Sue Dockett

Abstract

Transition to school is an important time in any child's life. For Australian Aboriginal children, it is particularly important because it requires children, their families and communities to interact with many cultures different from those experienced before school. A team consisting of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers from the University of Western Sydney has worked on this topic for a number of years. This paper discusses the success of programs designed to assist Aboriginal children at the time of transition to school and stresses the role of meaningful, trusting and respectful relationships. It also considers some of the challenges that are still to be met in the field.

Introduction

The *Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (NSW AECG/NSW DET, 2004) notes that the "Aboriginal population is the fastest-growing and youngest population in New South Wales, with over 50 percent of Aboriginal people under the age of 25 years" (p. 53). This report cites Australian Bureau of Statistics figures indicating that approximately 25 percent of Aboriginal people in NSW are aged under nine years (p. 53). This creates some major educational challenges, including:

- the need for reform supplemented by comprehensive support programs starting in the early years of school (Rothstein, 2004 cited in NSW AECG/NSW DET, 2004); and
- the importance of completed years of schooling as a predictor of health (Grossman & Kaestner, 1997; Vinson, 2002 both cited in NSW AECG/NSW DET, 2004).

Social and educational disadvantage are reflected in census statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001):

- life expectancy is around 20 years less than the average;
- general health is twice as likely to be reported as fair or poor; and
- unemployment is 20% compared to 7.2% and this would rise if Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) workers were counted as unemployed.

During 2002, the national adult imprisonment rate for Indigenous people was approximately 15 times that of non-Indigenous adults (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

An history of 'special treatment', dispossession, the exclusion acts and the intergenerational effects of the stolen generations have created great disadvantage but Indigenous people 'want equality with the wider Australian community – equality that leads to having access to the basic necessities that non-Indigenous Australians take for granted. Indigenous people want to be Indigenous people in their own country and not be penalised because they are Indigenous' (Wilson-Miller 1999, p.148.).

There is also much evidence of inequity of educational access, participation and outcomes for Aboriginal children in Australian schools (Adams, 1998; Cronin & Diezmann, 2002). Wyatt (2006), in the Foreword to the *Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey* report, volume 3, expresses this clearly:

It is important to accept the reality that the failure of over the past thirty years to improve the educational outcomes of the vast majority of Aboriginal school children has affected three generations of Aboriginal children and young people who are highly likely to have had limited access to lifelong learning, employment and economic opportunities ...there has been tacit acceptance of the non-achievement of educational standards by Aboriginal children and young people. The resultant acceptance of this lack of educational success has a cumulative effect. It is based on the belief that Aboriginal children and young people will never reach their full potential ...their low level of educational success is accepted as a normative expectation. This has to change. (p. vi)

Frigo and Adams (2002, p. 1) suggest that many issues merge early in school-home connections and are perpetuated throughout school life:

In the early childhood years (0-8 years), Indigenous students are less likely to participate in preschooling than their non-Indigenous peers, they have higher rates of absenteeism beginning in primary school, and the early indications of their educational achievement, as measured by state-wide English literacy assessments, indicate that, as a group, they perform at a lower level compared to their non-Indigenous peers.

In this paper, one attempt to document practices that might have positive effects on educational issues for young Indigenous children is explored.

What is transition to school?

Transition to school is understood as a process of relationship building (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Pianta & Cox, 1999) supported by a range of activities or experiences. In this sense, transition is something that is experienced, rather than something that happens to the child and family. The concept of transition as a process suggests that the timeframe needs to be flexible. Some transition programs operate well before children start school, others start before school and continue on through school until such a point is reached where those involved in transition agree that additional support is no longer necessary. In some situations, transition programs may begin when children start school. For example, if children start school without having made any prior contact with that school, the process of becoming familiar with school, the people in it and the expectations of school starts at the same time.

All participants and stakeholders in transition influence the process and the experiences, and are influenced by the transition. Stakeholders and participants in transition include children, families, educators, other professionals or agencies and communities. Transition to school occurs within a specific context. The most effective transition programs are those that acknowledge and are responsive to that context (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Transition programs and experiences can provide an important basis for a successful start to school. Transition programs and experiences are a major means of establishing continuity between prior-to-school and school environments and expectations, and building upon and extend the supportive relationships and connections that may

already exist between families, community and educators. Where these elements do not already exist, transition programs provide an opportunity for these to be established and maintained (Dockett & Perry, 2006; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

Why is a successful transition to school important?

The ease with which children start school has long term impacts on children's school success and family involvement with the school (Alexander & Entwisle, 1998; Luster & McAdoo, 1996). Children who experience early school success are reported to exhibit higher levels of social competence and academic achievement than those who experience difficulty starting school (Early, Pianta, & Cox, 1999; Shepard & Smith, 1989).

Effective transition programs have the potential to help children—as well as their families and communities—feel comfortable, valued and successful in school. Ramey (1999, cited in Viadero, 1999), has summarised the impact of successful transitions as:

- children have good feelings about school, teachers, parents, and peers;
- children show good progress in physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development;
- parents and key adults express positive attitudes toward school and promote children's learning;
- teachers and school personnel provide programs adapted to children's individual development and cultural/linguistic diversity; and
- mutually supportive relationships occur among families, school personnel, service providers, communities.

Effective transition programs have the potential to help children, their families and communities, to feel comfortable, valued and successful in school and to assist educators as they develop positive learning environments for children starting school. Bailey (1999, p. xv) summarises the importance of transition in the following way:

Kindergarten is a context in which children make important conclusions about school as a place where they want to be and about themselves as learners vis-a-vis schools. If no other objectives are accomplished, it is essential that the transition to school occur in such a way that children and families have a positive view of the school and that children have a feeling of perceived competence as learners.

Transition practices and programs vary widely. Partly, this is because different contexts require different responses, partly it is because of the diversity of resources (human and material) that are available to support these programs, partly it is because different people are involved in different places.

Positive relationships

Effective transition programs are based on relationships. Without a strong focus on relationships, practices and supports occur in isolation and there is an overall sense of discontinuity and disconnection.

The *Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (NSW AECG/NSW DET, 2004) noted that many Aboriginal children begin school before they turn 5 and many of them have not accessed formal early childhood education services: “The importance

of a positive relationship between staff and Aboriginal parents and caregivers from the first day of school is critical” (NSW AECG/NSW DET, 2004, p. 70).

A wide range of relationships has been connected with positive adjustment to school (Pianta, 1998). These include positive relationships between parents and teachers (Epstein, 1996); peer relationships including friendships (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996); and children’s relationships with teachers (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Family relationships remain important, as children draw upon these to develop relationships outside the family (Corrie, 2001). The multiple interactions and connections that occur as children start school can provide much support to children and families as they enter the world of formal schooling.

A sense of belonging to the school community is an important contributor to how well children and families adjust to school. Osterman (2000, p. 359) notes that within the school community, “students who experience acceptance are more highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school”. There are clear indications that some children and families do not feel ‘connected’ to the school community—rather they experience alienation at school. There are many potential reasons for this, including differences in home and school culture (Toomey, 1989), and expectations of home and school (Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Piotrkowski, & Parker, 1999).

Aboriginal¹ children starting school

Starting school is an important time when children establish identities of themselves as learners within the context of school (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). This can be particularly important for Aboriginal children. Schools in which Aboriginal children are achieving tend to support Aboriginal culture and actively engage young Aboriginal children in learning. There is often a strong Aboriginal presence at the school—both in terms of students and staff. As well, strong links between the community and the school are evident, and seen as vital in promoting a smooth transition between home and school.

In Canada, the importance of family involvement within Aboriginal communities has been recognised in several reports, culminating in the view that:

When valid and effective partnerships between the education community and Aboriginal communities are established, and when these partnerships enable and assist Aboriginal parents to have greater engagement with their children’s education and greater involvement in schools, then Aboriginal students will experience improved success in schools. (Malatest, 2002, p. 5)

Canadian research, which is representative of findings in other Indigenous communities (such as First Nations, Plains Indian and Inuit communities) suggests that there are several distinct barriers that impede communication and collaboration between Aboriginal families and schools. Barriers include:

1. Negative educational experiences of Aboriginal parents

Many Aboriginal adults have had negative experiences at school, and these experiences influence current perceptions and expectations. Consequences may

¹ In keeping with the protocol established in the Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (NSW AECG/NSW DET, 2004, p. 11), the term Aboriginal is used in this report to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

include Aboriginal families feeling uncomfortable about volunteering to assist in class, or in helping with homework.

2. *Barriers to communication*

Miscommunication can result when there are differences in the preferred communication styles of people, when there are language differences and when communication uses jargon.

3. *Lack of understanding by schools*

Aboriginal parents reported a lack of understanding or empathy from schools related to the difficulties and challenges that were unique to Aboriginal families.

4. *Cultural awareness*

A lack of cultural awareness was linked to varying expectations of family involvement in schools, with Aboriginal families and schools having different views about what constituted successful engagement. There was a noted concern for Aboriginal families discussing their children with people they did not know or trust. Aboriginal families saw schools as having a view of a single Aboriginal culture, failing to recognise the diversity of Aboriginal culture and experience. In addition, locally relevant resources and curriculum was often missing, or outdated.

5. *Poverty and illness in Aboriginal families*

Poverty has an impact on interactions with school when a lack of resources means that accessing transport to get to school is difficult, or when the cost of child care prohibits attendance at school functions. Chronic health problems also limit possible interactions with schools.

6. *Lack of engagement strategies by schools*

Aboriginal families report that some efforts to involve them in schools do not seem genuine – for example asking them to attend celebrations of Aboriginal culture when they have not been consulted about the celebrations or had input.

7. *The intimidation factor*

Parents can feel intimidated by the school environment and the people within it. Some families report racism in their dealings with school.

8. *Negative nature of parental contact*

Often, contact between schools and families related to discussing problems children were experiencing.

9. *'Segregation' of Aboriginal students.*

A predominance of Aboriginal children in support classes or special programs was often regarded as a form of segregation: "While Aboriginal parents acknowledged that such supports were often necessary, it was also noted that such programs should not become a catch-all for Aboriginal students who may be experiencing difficulties in a traditional classroom setting" (Malatest, 2002, p. 14).

While these factors have been identified in a different cultural and political context, they resonate with issues identified in discussions of parent-school collaboration and communication within Australia.

The *Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004), indicates that “one of the most effective ways to support Aboriginal children into the formal school setting is through transition programs which prepare children for Kindergarten” (p. 64). The following factors are identified as underpinning successful transition programs (p. 64):

- involvement of Aboriginal families and key Aboriginal groups in decision-making
- positive relationships and genuine collaboration between families, schools, early childhood services, key community groups and local service providers
- a learning community that promotes the sharing of information, cultural insights and expertise by all parties concerned with children’s transition to school
- a holistic approach to addressing the specific health, development and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal children in the context of strengthening the capacity of families and communities to meet those needs
- a dual focus on providing information and support for parents as well as quality early learning experiences for children.

The review noted the support for transition programs from Aboriginal families and communities, and identified a specific need to “develop strategies to support transition to school for all Aboriginal children, including children attending Aboriginal preschools, DET preschools, other early childhood services and particularly children who do not access any prior-to-school services” (p. 65).

Methodology

The data for this paper have been gathered throughout NSW using a variety of approaches, over many years. Some of these approaches are:

- Interviews, or, more often, conversations. Many of the interviews were one-on-one but group discussions were also used. Focus groups were sometimes utilised but much ‘value added’ data was collected by the process of yarning within Aboriginal communities. (Yarning is a process that takes established relationships and time to progress and although not as structured as some focus groups, usually delivers ‘enhanced’ information.)
- Drawings and photographs usually completed by children.
- Statistics and records available generally of from particular educational settings such as schools, preschools, and long daycare centres.

The people involved in the data generation process were numerous and included both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. For example, participants included children, parents/carers, school teachers and prior to school educators, Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs), Schools as Community Centres (SaCC) coordinators, Aboriginal Elders and other members of communities. Much valuable information was gained from Aboriginal preparing teachers in the Aboriginal Rural Education Program (AREP) at the University of Western Sydney.

Results

The following is a list of strategies that have been successful in facilitating Aboriginal children’s transition to school in the context of their families and communities. In

some cases, we know only that a given strategy has been successful in one community. In others, the success has been more widespread.

This list of strategies has been derived from the many research projects we have undertaken in partnership with many Aboriginal children, their families, educators and communities. We know that context is important in transition to school practices (Dockett & Perry, 2001), and part of that context is the particular time at which the practices were used. In summary, these practices have been successful in at least one context and at one time. There is no guarantee that they will be successful in a different context or even in the same context at a different time. However, the likelihood is that many practices will have a broad usefulness in a number of Aboriginal communities. There are many groups into which the successful practices might be organised. To illustrate the results here, we have selected just two such groups.

Relationships. The key to all successful transition to school programs is the development of strong, respectful and trusting relationships among the key players in the transition program. In general, schools make valiant efforts to attract all parents to their transition to school activities. However, many school complain that they only ever get to these activities those who already know about the school or who are actively involved with the school. A common lament is that “we never see the parents that we really need to see” or “we invite them but they never come”. For many Aboriginal parents, an invitation to go to the school is not seen as a highlight of their lives, particularly if their past experiences with their own schooling have not been particularly positive. As one Aboriginal mother said “I would rather crawl over broken glass than go anywhere near a school”. Clearly, there need to be other ways developed to increase the likelihood that such parents might interact positively with the school.

Some suggestions for such practices are:

- a fathers’ group in the school in which Aboriginal dads can be involved in meaningful activities with their children and the teachers of their children, thus building the image of their being valued participants in the education effort;
- the use of the CDEP projects to develop locally culturally relevant artworks, gardens etc in the school not only to provide community visibility in the school but also to provide opportunities for local community members to experience the school environment;
- schools can disseminate information about transition programs to places where most Aboriginal people in the community might find it – doctors’ surgeries, Aboriginal Medical Service, Centrelink, shopping centres, community clubs;
- playgroups commenced during the early part of the year in a respected Aboriginal community member’s front yard but supported by the prior-to-school settings and schools – as the playgroup grows, it can gradually move some of its activities to the school;
- a shopfront was set up on the regular fortnightly shopping day containing information about transition to school as well as other important community information;
- SaCC coordinators and AEAs can be key people in building relationships between schools and Aboriginal community members – they have used door-

knocking, provision of transport, gentle cajoling, joking and shaming in order to bring some Aboriginal parents into the school environment;

- school expos have worked well in some communities, especially when they were held in non-school settings – examples include Starting School Picnics, street marches to celebrate the first day of school, and parent evenings held by all schools in a district at a local club;
- involvement of Aboriginal Elders or other revered community members in the transition to school program sends a very positive signal to other community members that the activities are worth their involvement.

Al children are capable learners. The power of expectations on young learners' outcomes is well known. Basically, if a child is expected to do well by their teachers, parents and other significant people, there is a very good chance that the child will do well. Unfortunately, the converse also holds. Often, the expectation is that Aboriginal children, especially if they are deemed 'young' – only just age eligible for school – will not do well in their first year of school. Teachers who hold such an expectation cannot help but work towards it, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, if teachers knew how successful many of these children have been in preschool or how independently capable they are in their own homes, the teachers' expectations may be different. Some transition to school practices that have been implemented to facilitate the belief that Aboriginal children starting school are capable learners include:

- the development of strong links between school and prior-to-school educators so that information about the realistic capabilities of children can be shared;
- the provision of a holistic and culturally relevant curriculum in the first year of school so that Aboriginal children in particular, but all children in general, can learn that there is something at school that is interesting and relevant to them;
- a realisation that the definition of literacy used in the first year of school needs to be flexible in order to encompass the oral and artistic traditions of communication that are often strongly part of Aboriginal communities;
- the implementation of a 'buddies' program in which Aboriginal children are able to link in some cases with other Aboriginal children who are aware of the cultural needs of the children and their capabilities and in other cases with non-Aboriginal children who have been given the task of finding out about the neophytes' cultural beliefs and practices – thus the Aboriginal children starting school become the educators of their buddies in some aspects of their relationships.

Discussion

It is well known that transition to school programs and the planning for these is generally carried out by school personnel, sometimes in partnership with other stakeholders such as families, prior-to-school educators and communities. In her recent article on Swedish early childhood education, Pramling Samuelsson (2006, p. 109) suggested that there is "a general trend toward dominance of the elementary school over the preschool in setting agendas for cooperation". In our work on the transition to school of Aboriginal children and their families, it has become very clear that successful practices are those that are jointly devised and implemented by the school and the other stakeholders, especially those in the local Aboriginal communities.

It is important to remember that most schools believe that they are doing just about as much as they can possibly do on transition to school within the resources available to them. However, one aspect that does seem to be missed in many transition to school programs is a thorough evaluation of the program before, during and after each new cohort starts school. To this end, the authors have developed the *Indicators of Progress* – a matrix setting transition practices against levels of outcome and enabling transition teams to measure their progress on a number of key variables (for full details of the matrix and its use, see Dockett & Perry, 2006). While we cannot go into the details of the *Indicators of Progress* here, it is worth mentioning that many of the sites in which the transition of Aboriginal children was a major component of the transition to school program have used them to help them see how they might improve their attempts to engage with the Aboriginal communities in which the school exists. Through such a self-reflection using a structured instrument, transition teams in these sites have developed many of the practices we listed earlier.

Our work has exemplified many of the criteria outlined by Malatest (2002) and NSW AECG/NSW DET (2004) as critical to success as Aboriginal children start school. The key, as always, is the development of meaningful, trustful and positive relationships among all of the stakeholders. While this finding is not peculiar to Aboriginal communities, what does need specific consideration is the ways in which these relationships can be built through culturally relevant processes. Many of the transition practices celebrated in this paper do just this.

Conclusion

Starting school is an important time in the lives of children. Children who successfully adjust to school, who feel connected to school and who have positive relationships with the adults and other children at school, are likely to experience school success. This is particularly the case for Aboriginal children. Families who feel involved with, supported by and connected with the school are likely to support their children in ways that promote their engagement with school. Schools and other community agencies that work together not only support each other, but also support the children and families with whom they work. The resources put into making the transition to school a positive one—characterised by strong relationships between all involved—are minimal compared with those required to manage problems that emerge later and which may have their roots in ineffective transitions to school.

References

- Adams, I. (1998). The educational plight of Indigenous Australian students in the early years of schooling. *Unicorn*, 24, 5-15.
- Alexander, K., & Entwisle, D. (1998). Facilitating the transition to first grade: The nature of transition and research on factors affecting it. *Elementary School Journal*, 98(4), 351-364.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001). *Population Characteristics: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004). *Year Book Australia, Crime and Justice: Deaths in Custody*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Bailey, D. (1999). Foreword. In R. C. Pianta & M. J. Cox (Eds.). *The transition to Kindergarten* (pp. xv-xvi). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- Baker, A., Kessler-Sklar, S., Piotrkowski, C., & Parker, F. L. (1999). Kindergarten and first-grade teachers' reported knowledge of parents' involvement in their children's education. *Elementary School Journal*, 99(4), 367-380.
- Corrie, L. (2001). Begin with relationships. In S. Dockett & B. Perry (Eds.), *Beginning school together: Sharing strengths* (pp. 1-8). Canberra: Australian Early Childhood Association.

- Cronin, R. P., & Diezmann, C. M. (2002). Jane and Gemma go to school: Supporting young gifted Aboriginal students. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 27(4), 12-17.
- Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (Eds.) (2001). *Beginning school together: Sharing strengths*. Watson, ACT: Australian Early Childhood Association.
- Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2006). *Starting school: A guide for educators*. Sydney: Pademelon Press.
- Early, D., Pianta, R., & Cox, M. (1999). Kindergarten teachers and classrooms: A transition context. *Early Education and Development*, 10(1), 25-46.
- Epstein, J. L. (1996). Advances in family, community and school partnerships. *New Schools, New Communities*, 12(3), 5-13.
- Fabian, H. & Dunlop, A.-W. (Eds.) (2002). *Transitions in the early years: Debating continuity and progression for young children*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Frigo, T., & Adams, I. (2002). Diversity and learning in the early years of school. Paper presented at the *Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education*, Brisbane, December.
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development*, 72(2), 625-638.
- Ladd, G. W., Birch, S., & Buhs, E. (1999). Children's social and scholastic lives in Kindergarten: Related spheres of influence? *Child Development*, 70(6), 1373-1400.
- Ladd, G. W., Kochenderfer, B. J., & Coleman, C.C. (1996). Friendship quality as a predictor of young children's early school adjustment. *Child Development*, 67, 1103-1118.
- Luster, T., & McAdoo, H. (1996). Family and child influences on educational attainment: A secondary analysis of the High Scope/Perry Preschool data. *Developmental Psychology*, 32, 26-39.
- Malatest, R. (2002). Parent and education engagement partnership project: Discussion paper. Available on-line: http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/reports/parent_engage_pdf
- NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group/NSW Department of Education and Training, (2004). *The report of the review of Aboriginal education*. Sydney: Author.
- Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(3), 323-367.
- Pianta, R. C. (1998). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
- Pianta, R. C., & Kraft-Sayre, M. (2003). *Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families, and schools*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H Brookes.
- Pianta, R., & Cox, M. (Eds.). (1999). *The transition to kindergarten*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2006). Teaching and learning in preschool and the first years of elementary school in Sweden. In J. Einarsdóttir & J. T. Wagner (Eds.), *Nordic childhoods and early education*, pp. 101-131. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. (1989). *Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention*. New York: Falmer Press.
- Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Clarke, P. (2000). *Supporting identity, diversity, and language in the early years*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Toomey, D. (1989). How home-school relations policies can increase educational inequality: A three year follow-up. *Australian Journal of Education*, 33(3), 284-298.
- Viadero, D. (1999). Make or break. *Education Week*, 18(34), 158-172.
- Wilson-Miller, J. (1999) A history of special treatment. In R. G. Craven (Ed), *Teaching Aboriginal studies*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Wyatt, K. (2006). Foreword. In S. R. Zubrick, S. R. Silburn, J. A. De Maio, C. Shepherd, J. A. Griffin, R.B., Dalby, F. G. Mitrou, D. M. Lawrence, C. Hayward, G. Pearson, H. Milroy, J. Milroy & A. Cox, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the educational experiences of Aboriginal children and young people* (pp. vi-x). Perth: Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.

About the authors

Terry Mason is a senior lecturer in the School of Education and co-ordinator of the Aboriginal Rural Education Program based on the Bankstown Campus of the University of Western Sydney. He also co-ordinates “Issues in Aboriginal Education”, a core unit for all teaching students. He was a reader of written submissions for the Review of Aboriginal Education 2004, involved in the transition to school research team and is part of the current mentor program for Aboriginal students team in north west Sydney.

Contact Details

Terry Mason
P.O. Box 12
Milpra Post Office 2214

Phone: 9772 6194
Fax: 9772 6738
Email: t.mason@uws.edu.au

Bob Perry is Associate Professor of Education at the University of Western Sydney where he teaches mathematics education, research methods in education and transition to school units. He has worked in tertiary institutions in Australia since 1972. Bob has worked since 1997 in the field of educational transitions. He is widely published both nationally and internationally and is well-regarded as a speaker on transition to school for both early childhood professionals and parents. With Sue Dockett, he has written three books published in 2006 which translate much of the Starting School Research Project’s research into practice for educators, families and researchers. In 2007, Bob will take up the position of Associate Professor of Education at Charles Sturt University.

Sue Dockett is Associate Professor in early childhood education at the University of Western Sydney. Sue has taught in the early years of school and been director of long day care and work based care programs in Sydney. Since 1988, she has been involved in the early childhood teacher education program at the University of Western Sydney. Her research agenda is focused on the transition to school and the expectations, experiences and perceptions of all involved. She is director of the *Continuity and Change: Educational Transitions* research concentration, and has published widely, both nationally and internationally in the area of transition to school. Sue is a national and international leader in research on transition to school. She currently has international research projects with colleagues in USA, Scotland and Canada. In 2007, Sue will take up the position of Professor of Early Childhood Education at Charles Sturt University.