**Title:** Preschool + school + communication = What for educator relationships?

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**Abstract:** Communication between educators in preschool and school settings has been promoted consistently in research literature and policy as a practice to enhance children’s transition to school. Underlying the practice are the assumptions that communication between educators is (a) a way of building on children’s learning and responding to their diverse needs and interests as they start school and (b) a means of developing positive relationships between educators. Whilst it is an advocated practice, th ...

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Preschool + school + communication = What for educator relationships?

Communication between educators in preschool and school settings has been promoted consistently in transition to school literature and policy as a practice to enhance children’s transition to school. Underlying the practice are the assumptions that communication between educators is a) a way of building on children’s learning and responding to their diverse needs and interests as they start school, and b) a means of developing positive relationships between educators. Whilst it is an advocated practice, there has been little research about the consequences of preschool-school communication, or exploration of the ways in which the practice might support positive transition experiences. This paper specifically addresses what happens for educators as a result of preschool-school interactions. The communication experiences of preschool and school educators reported in an online questionnaire provide important insights into the impact of intersetting communications, particularly on educator relationships. Most outcomes for relationships between educators in preschool and school settings were reported to be positive. However, the results contest the notion that preschool-school communication automatically results in the development of positive relationships; relationships which support collaboration between educators as children start school.

Keywords: transition to school; communication; educators; preschool; relationships

Introduction

The importance of a positive start to school has been well-established (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007; Margetts, 2009). One element of a positive start to school is the support children receive from adults, including their preschool and school educators. Communication between educators has been widely advocated as a practice which can enhance children’s transition to school. However, few research studies to date have examined preschool-school communication in-depth, including what happens when preschool and school educators communicate with each other. This paper reports on what educators in Australia identify as the outcomes of their intersetting communication for themselves and other educators.
Recent early childhood education reforms in Australia have provided increased impetus for preschool and school educators to communicate with each other. Released in 2009, the national curriculum framework for preschools, the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) states that children’s preschool and school educators “commit to sharing information about each child’s knowledge and skills” and that this practice should “ensure a successful transition” (p.16). State education departments have also created an expectation for the practice of communication between preschools and schools. For example, in Victoria, the completion of written *Transition Learning and Development Statements* (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2009) by children’s preschool educators has been linked to preschools’ funding agreement, at least in principle, since their introduction in 2009. This has created an obligation for preschool educators in Victoria to communicate with schools, with the consent of families. The transition statements are intended to facilitate the transfer of written information about children’s learning from their preschool to their new school.

**Theoretical background**

Bioecological perspectives on transition provide much of the rationale for promoting preschool-school communication. In his early work, Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined *intersetting communication* as “messages transmitted from one setting to the other with the express intent of providing specific information to persons in the other setting” (p. 210). He proposed that a child’s development is enhanced when, prior to entry into a new setting, the members of both settings are “provided with information, advice and experience relevant to the impending transition” (p. 217) and that once the child has moved into the new setting their development is “enhanced to the extent that valid information, advice and experience relevant to one setting are made available, on a continuing basis, to the other” (p. 217). Bronfenbrenner also hypothesised that “open channels of communication in both directions” (p. 216) between settings will influence a child’s development. Although not redefined in Bronfenbrenner’s later work, intersetting communication is incorporated into bioecological perspectives (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) which have provided the background for the development of bioecological models of transition (see for example; Dunlop, 2014). Such models have guided research and practice in children’s transition to school.
Communication between preschool and school educators at the time of children’s transition to school has been promoted as a way of gathering authentic information about children’s prior knowledge. This practice is advocated in order to assist school educators in constructing teaching and learning programs based on what children already know and can do, thereby helping children to become confident and capable learners in the new school setting (Dockett & Perry, 2006; Niesel & Griebel, 2007). Preschool-school communication has been recommended as one strategy to promote continuity between children’s experiences of preschool and school, where continuity is defined as “coherence of children’s experience in curriculum, pedagogy and culture” (Petriwskyj, Thorpe, & Tayler, 2005, p. 57). For example, research studies focussing on improving pedagogical continuity have advocated greater communication between preschools and schools (see for example, Ashton et al., 2008; Li, Rao, & Tse, 2011). Recommendations from transitions research include the exchange of information about children’s learning and the programs they attend (Fabian, 2013). In this way preschool-school communication has been consistently promoted in the literature as one of several possible solutions to the lack of continuity between preschool and school pedagogy and curriculum as children start school (Petriwskyj et al., 2005).

Whilst the practice of intersetting communication has been advocated primarily as a means of information transfer, communication is also the foundation of interpersonal relationships (Verderber, Verderber, & Berryman-Fink, 2010). Positive relationships between children’s preschool and school educators, serving as a basis for collaboration in planning for children’s transition, have been promoted as one of the key elements of an effective transition program (Dockett & Perry, 2006). It is argued that relationships between children’s educators are important because they influence children’s transition to school “both directly and indirectly” (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p. 492). Relationships between educators can support children starting school directly by educators working together, for example, in the collaborative development of transition programs. Biocultural models of transition emphasise that relationships develop through interactions over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and in Australia, early childhood educator networks in some communities provide for the development of relationships between educators over months and years. It has been argued that the development of relationships between the key adults in children’s lives should be regarded as an outcome of a positive start to school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Intersetting communication then, is about more than just information transfer, as Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) definition suggests.
Intersetting communication as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that communication is a means of transferring of information from one setting to the other. Since current models of transition promote the development of relationships, it is necessary to expand Bronfenbrenner’s original definition of intersetting communication to encompass relationships as well as information exchange. *Intersetting communication*, (used interchangeably in this paper with *preschool-school communication*) is defined as:

any interaction between preschool and school settings which may be uni-directional or bi-directional and serve a variety of functions including, but not limited to, the transfer of information and the development of relationships between educators.

**Preschool-school communication: The literature**

For the development of positive relationships between educators, and for continuity of children’s learning and experiences, preschool-school communication has become an important focus of transition policy and practice internationally (OECD, 2006) as well as in Australia. Leading transition researchers have suggested particular intersetting communication practices such as: the transfer of children’s learning and development records, educators visiting each other’s programs, the collaborative planning of transition activities, the development of complementary curricula and membership of transition networks (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Margetts, 2002a, 2002b). However, communication between educators is a practice more talked about than enacted. For example, in a comparative study of transition practices in Iceland and Australia, more teachers reported that meetings to discuss curricula and observation of classroom practices, activities which require intersetting communication, were ‘good ideas’, than actually participated in these in practice (Einarsdóttir, Perry, & Dockett, 2008). In Ireland, very few preschool educators reported that they transferred children’s records to schools (O’Kane & Hayes, 2006) and in Australia, Hopps (2004) reported that educators regarded intersetting communication as a good idea, but a difficult one to put into practice.

In Australia intersetting communication is situated within a context of a great divide separating preschools and schools. Despite some re-structuring to move them under the same government portfolios, preschools and schools are divided in the way that the workforce is organised, curriculum and pedagogy is conceptualised and services are located. Differences are also noted in funding structures, regulations, and qualifications of educators. In general,
preschool educators receive poorer pay, have fewer opportunities for professional
development and support, and have lower professional status than their colleagues in schools
(Productivity Commission, 2011). Qualifications, remuneration and conditions of
employment have been identified as impacting negatively on preschool educators’
professional identity (Moloney, 2010). In terms of differences in educators’ professional
identities and in many other ways, preschool and schools have boundaries which must be
crossed, in order for educators to communicate with each other.

There is also evidence that there are power relations in interactions between school
and preschool educators. Foucault (1997) defines power relations as “strategic games
between liberties – in which some try to control the conduct of others, who in turn try to
avoid allowing their conduct to be controlled or try to conduct the conduct of others” (p.
299). The research literature suggests a level of resistance from preschool and school
educators to communicating with each other. Partly, this has been attributed to the constraints
of each working environment, governed as each is by different curricula and pressures
(Ashton et al., 2008). Another possible explanation recognises resistance to changing practice
and incorporating different ways of doing things in the classroom (Broström, 2002).
Preschool educators, in particular, report concerns related to a potential imposition of school
curriculum and the subsequent loss of preschool pedagogy and ideology (MacNaughton,
2005). The resistance of preschool and school educators can be viewed as an exercise of
power, where ‘regimes of truth’, in the form of the ideologies behind different curricula, are
used to both support and resist struggles for power over preferred ways of constructing
curriculum (MacNaughton, 2005).

The utility of the information shared by preschools with schools has been questioned.
Cassidy (2005) noted that school educators did not use information about children provided
by preschool educators, arguing that it was not appropriate for their purposes. A general
mistrust of reports about children coming from preschool educators and an unwillingness
from the school educators to have working relationships with preschool educators has also
been reported (Ashton et al., 2008). However, in Ireland preschool and school educators who
collaboratively developed and used a ‘Child snapshot form’ to transfer information about
children from preschool to school, were positive about the utility of the document in
supporting children’s transition (O’Kane & Hayes, 2010).

A small amount of evidence is available in the extant literature about the outcomes for
children of communication between preschool and school educators. The cooperative
development of curricula between preschool and school educators, and the passing on of children’s written education records from preschool to school were reported as the best predictors of children’s academic development in the first year of school in Finland (Ahtola et al., 2011). In a U.S. study, communication between preschool and school educators about curricula and the children starting school resulted in those children being judged by their school educators to have positive social competence and fewer negative behaviour problems than children whose teachers did not engage in these practices (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008). There is some evidence that preschool-school communication benefits children, but there is scant detail of the outcomes of communication for educators.

Preschool-school communication is prominent as a recommendation in the transition literature. It is also a practice which is promoted through policy based on two assumptions: that intersetting communication a) will result in positive relationships between educators and b) will assist school educators to build teaching and learning programs based on children’s prior knowledge, and help them to respond to children’s diverse needs and interests. However, there is an absence of knowledge in the extant literature about what happens as a result of preschool-school communication. This paper specifically addresses the question of: What are the outcomes of preschool-school communication for educators? After outlining the context and participants, methods and results of the research, this paper then moves to an examination of the two outcomes which have been suggested by research and policy as well as other outcomes identified by educators themselves.

**Context and participants**

The study was located in two states of Australia – New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria – and in both, preschools and schools are governed by their respective state education department. Whilst there are some similarities, there are also differences between the states in terms of the context for intersetting communication between educators. This section describes some aspects of the Australian context in which the study is situated before moving to details of the participants.

The location of schools and preschools as well as the composition of first year of school classes are features of the Australian context which impact on the nature of preschool-school communications. With some exceptions, most preschools and schools in NSW and Victoria are located on separate sites, that is, they are not ‘co-located’ and they have different governing bodies. This means that preschool and school educators do not ordinarily have
daily contact with each other. The composition of first year of school classes varies between schools, often depending upon the number of children enrolled and the size of the school. In some schools, children are in ‘straight classes’ consisting entirely of children in the same year level. In other schools, children in the first year of school may be placed in a class with children in their second or third year of school to form a ‘composite class’. Children’s skills and abilities can factor into decisions on the placement of children particularly into these composite classes, but there are a multitude of other influences that impact on decisions about class composition.

In Australia, children must start school in the year they turn six, but the youngest age at which children are permitted to start school varies between states. NSW has the youngest starting school age in Australia, permitting children to start school if they turn 5 before 31 July of that year. In Victoria, children can start school only if they turn 5 before 30 May. On entry to government schools in NSW, children’s literacy and numeracy skills are assessed using an instrument called the Best Start Kindergarten Assessment (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2010). The information gathered in this assessment is designed to be used by school educators to develop teaching and learning programs in the first year of school. The assessment often occurs in the first few days or weeks of school. In Victorian government schools, Module 1 of the English Online Interview (DEECD, 2012) is a mandated assessment that is conducted at the beginning of the first school year.

Preschool and school educators from two regional areas participated in this study. These regions are large in terms of their geographical size and include a number of major regional cities as well as many smaller rural towns and villages. Educators in the study had a diverse range of positions in their settings including classroom teachers, preschool directors and school principals. All had a role in children’s transitions to school and were potential participants in intersetting communication. Two hundred and thirteen educators were involved in the larger study. This paper reports on data from online questionnaires which were responded to by 184 educators (104 preschool and 79 school). The questionnaires were distributed to 149 preschools and 120 schools in total and one educator from each setting was invited to complete the questionnaire. The response rate to the questionnaires overall was 68% and this can be attributed to the researcher’s personal contact by phone or in person with each participant.

This sub-sample of educators from the larger study was overwhelmingly female and most had 10 years or more experience in their field. Reflecting the general situation in NSW
and Victoria, the majority of educators (92% of preschool and 85% of school) worked in schools and preschools which were not co-located, although there were a small number of educators from co-located sites. Most respondents had a Bachelor degree or higher qualification. The educators worked in a range of schools and preschools including government and non-government primary schools, private and community-based preschools.

**Method**

This study employed a questionnaire modified from an existing instrument: Hargie and Tourish’s (2009) adaptation of the International Communication Association (ICA) survey. Two versions were created: the *Preschool-school Communication Survey* for preschool educators and the *School-preschool Communication Survey* for school educators. The questionnaires went through several stages of development including consultation with a reference group and piloting, before being administered through the online SurveyMonkey program (SurveyMonkey.com LLC, 2011).

The two questionnaires were divided into eleven sections and included rating scales and a variety of open-ended questions. In the final section, educators shared one particular intersetting communication experience (ICE). Educators were asked to describe the ICE, including the consequences of it for themselves and for others. Sixty-six school educators and 79 preschool educators described a specific ICE. The ICEs varied in length from a couple of sentences to a paragraph. The ICEs were often brief responses and did not always include depth of information about the communication experience. Two of the ICEs are reproduced here in full:

After I contacted all local schools by letter inviting them to come to preschool to see the children going onto their school the following year, Sally came to our service and spoke to Diane, teacher in charge in relation to all the children going into her class. Sally was also able to watch these children within the preschool setting for about one hour before returning to school. Sally was able to ask direct questions to Diane about each child before receiving their written portfolio at the end of the year. The information gained helped group the children into appropriate classes. (Preschool educator).

I contacted the local preschool director to source more information on a student with a severe language delay. The director had comprehensive observation notes on the child and a file of past reports and information that was very helpful. (School educator)

Of the reported ICEs, 52 school educators and 61 preschool educators included a description of the consequences of the communication. These consequences were coded
initially in a procedure described by Richards (2009) as broad brush coding. Analytic coding of the data was then performed by collating the data into categories and subcategories (Richards, 2009). Three broad categories of outcomes were identified: outcomes for educators, children and families. Outcomes for educators are reported in this paper and included data relating to the educator themselves, as well as their perceptions of outcomes for other educators. Quantitative content analysis (Bryman, 2012) involved the counting of subcategories that were identified in the qualitative data coding. Frequencies of the subcategories were calculated and the main subcategories are presented here with examples.

Results
A range of outcomes for educators were reported in the ICEs including positive and negative impacts on relationships, assistance in getting ready for the new entrants, and influencing practice in the ‘other’ setting.

Relationship outcomes
Outcomes for relationships were reported more than any other outcome of intersetting communication for educators, described by 35 preschool educators (57%) and 18 school educators (35%). Both positive and negative outcomes for relationships were reported. Positive relationship outcomes included when preschool and school educators described working together as a result of their communication. For example, a school educator noted that regular network meetings with preschool educators in her town had “allowed us to work collaboratively on a number of projects.”

Positive outcomes also included when preschool and school educators reported feeling valued, appreciated or included by the communication experience they described, such as: “The [preschool] staff make us feel very welcome”, or where respect for colleagues had been built: “Because of our network, I always feel I have positive relationships with my preschool colleagues. We have developed a healthy positive respect for each other”.

Whilst most relationship outcomes for educators were described as being positive, several negative relationship outcomes were described as a result of the ICEs. These encompassed feelings of disappointment and frustration, and resulted in strained relationships. Comments about the outcomes of these ICEs included:

I was disappointed that she [the school educator] didn't ask my opinion after I had had this child at our preschool since the beginning of the year.
The result … was a breakdown of trust between the school and the preschool.

*Getting ready for children*

Nine preschool (15%) and ten school educators (19%) respectively, indicated that their ICE resulted in assisting schools to get ready for their new children. In particular, the experiences recorded were described as helping school educators get to know children. Comments from school educators included: “I found this experience really helpful as it helped ‘fill in the picture’ for me about these new children”, and from preschool educators “From this meeting, teachers then have a broad background understanding of the children and how they will adapt to a more formal learning environment”. Several educators noted more specifically that their ICE had helped to place children into specific classes.

How their ICE had helped school educators get ready for children was clear in some responses, but others contained very broadly-described outcomes. General terms such as “extremely beneficial”, “very helpful” and “very successful” were used, but these responses did not include specific information about outcomes. For example a child’s learning record given to a school by a preschool educator was described by the school educator who received it as containing “very valuable information which is very helpful and informative”, but no further details of the results of the information exchange were included in this response. A preschool educator specifically wrote that she did not know the outcome of her sending children’s portfolios to schools “I'm not sure whether or not schools look at them.”

*Sending messages to parents*

Five preschool and ten school educators (8% and 19% respectively) reported that their ICE had assisted in communicating messages or information to parents. A school principal responsible for a co-located preschool described how the preschool director had contacted him for help in communicating with a family who had refused to collect their unwell child from the centre. The result of the preschool’s request for the school principal’s help was that “the issue was quickly resolved”. Other examples included outcomes related to school promotion, that is, school educators wrote about providing information to preschools to pass on to parents. Two school educators wrote about how this sort of communication had resulted in increased enrolment numbers at their schools: “Numbers have almost doubled”, “Many of
the children end up coming to our school rather than the local catholic school”.

Non-achievement of intended outcomes
Two preschool (3%) and three school (6%) educators indicated that they did not achieve what had been intended through their interseting communication. For example, a preschool educator described trying to share children’s learning records with a school, but this was not achieved: “I was told they weren't interested because they spend the first week of term testing the children”. Similarly, the communication of another preschool educator with her co-located school, did not achieve the school visit excursion she had wanted for the children: “I asked the school principal if we could take our preschoolers over to use their library. He said he would look into it and we have never heard anything back and that was nearly a year ago.” A school educator described how they asked a preschool to make a change to their enrolment form “but this has not been followed up.”

Intersetting knowledge
Three preschool (5%) and three school educators (6%) commented in their ICEs that the outcome of the communication had been that they had gained knowledge about the other setting. This is an example of what Bronfenbrenner (1979) termed interseting knowledge. One school educator reported how communication between preschool and school educators at her local network meeting was the means by which “collaborative understandings of each other's field are built”. Other examples related to classroom visits, for example where a school educator visited a preschool classroom to talk to the staff and observe practice. A preschool educator described one such ICE as school educators getting “a feel of our learning environment”.

Flow of communication
Six preschool (10%) and four school (7%) educators described implications for the flow of communication between settings from their communication experiences: either that the particular interaction led to more communication, or that the experience resulted in future communications being reduced or ceasing all together. For example a school educator reported a communication experience with a preschool educator where there was a disagreement about the age at which children start school. The result of this ICE was that: “We eventually parted company agreeing to disagree. Future attempts at communication were rejected.” In contrast, a preschool educator noted a positive outcome from her communication
experience which involved a conversation with a school educator regarding children going to school: “As a consequence there has continued to be positive exchanges of information with this school”.

**Influencing practice in the other setting**

Some school (6%) and preschool educators (5%) described having an influence on practice in the other setting, as a result of their communication experiences. For example, a preschool educator reported that feedback she gave to a school regarding their transition program had resulted in a change in practice:

> I was asked how the program was running and when I mentioned the colouring-in activities and that the children found them uninteresting they changed the way they offered the art/craft activity. They offered more open-ended activities.

A school educator perceived that there had been a change in practice at a preschool after her communication with them about the results of first-year-of school assessments: “information regarding student areas of strength and weakness was shared with the preschool Director. She took this on board and has adjusted her teaching programs accordingly”.

**Discussion**

The results indicate that where the outcomes of preschool-school communication are known, they can have wide-ranging and multi-faceted impacts on educators. Among the results there is evidence that preschool-school communication has consequences for: relationships between educators, teaching and learning programs for school entrants, and practice in the ‘other’ setting. These particular results are discussed here before the conclusions of the study and recommendations for policy and practice are outlined.

**Relationships between educators**

Interset setting communication provided a context for the development of positive relationships between some preschool and school educators in this study. Examples are seen in the ways in which educators from different settings worked together around transition, the development of a “healthy positive respect for each other”, and educators feeling appreciated by the educators in the other setting. These results support the literature which argues that the practice of intersetting communication is about developing positive relations between people (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Relationships within which preschool and school educators respect and trust each other are likely to be relationships which facilitate educators
to work together to support children and families, and to “draw support from each other” (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group [ETC], 2011, p. 2) at the time of children’s transition to school.

However, not all relationships were affected positively by intersetting communication. Some intersetting communications resulted in educators feeling disappointed, frustrated and experiencing a “breakdown of trust” between settings. Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000, p. 501) assert that relationships are a key factor in children’s success during the transition to school in that “The quality of relationships within the transition ecology plays an important role in sustaining the child throughout this period of increased demand and challenge”. There is evidence from this study that the quality of relationships can be affected by particular communications, thus contesting the notion that educator communication necessarily generates positive relationships (Moutafidou & Sivropoulou, 2010). When relationships are strained, this is an additional challenge for educators to overcome in order to work collaboratively across settings to support children and families during times of transition.

**Building teaching and learning programs for school entrants**

Educators reported communication outcomes that helped schools to prepare for children starting school. It has previously been suggested in the literature and policy that information about children sent to schools by preschools may assist school educators “to treat and teach the pupils of the new class according to their personal traits and needs” (Ahtola et al., 2011, p. 300). It is argued that the transition to school is an opportunity for educators to extend children’s “existing knowledge, skills and understandings” (ETC, 2011, p. 1) from preschool into school. In this study there is some evidence of the use of information gathered in preschool-school communications to inform school programs. For example, school educators reported that information from preschools helped them to place children into class groups and to generally get to know children. This result contrasts with an earlier study by Cassidy (2005) that reported that school educators did not use the information passed on from preschools.

Although there is some detail of how school educators use information gathered from preschools, some preschool educators reported not knowing the outcomes of their communication or that their intended outcomes in providing information to schools had not been achieved. The resultant uncertainty for preschool educators in relation to how their
information is used and regarded by schools may impact on their willingness to continue to communicate across settings and thus have consequences for preschool-school relationships. Positive outcomes for relationships reported in this study include feeling valued and appreciated by educators in the other setting. Knowing about what happens with the information that is exchanged in communications is an important aspect of the relational dimension of preschool-school communication, particularly in terms of preschool educators feeling valued. This can in turn build mutual trust and respect between settings. Further knowledge is needed for preschool educators, as well as through empirical research, about how school educators use information transferred from preschool to school, particularly in relation to information about children’s prior knowledge and capabilities.

**Influencing practice**

Whilst theory and policy promote the practice of intersetting communication, based on the assumed outcomes of positive educator relationships and continuity of children’s experiences, there is evidence in this study of other consequences of the practice for educators. For example, data reported in this study indicate that intersetting communications can result in educators influencing practice in the ‘other’ setting. This included positive influences such as the preschool educator whose communication with a school resulted in transition activities more suited to the interests of the children. However, other communication experiences included outcomes which raise questions about the nature of the changes to practice which resulted from the interactions, for example, the preschool educator who changed their practice based on information from the school about children’s results in first-year-of-school assessments.

The influence of school on preschool practice has been highlighted in previous studies, where educators have expressed fears about a push-down curriculum and pressure to introduce more formal teaching methods in the early childhood years (Goldstein, 2007; Peters, 2000). It has been suggested that play as an approach to learning in preschools is increasingly under threat because of the pressures coming from the expectations of the school curriculum (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). The examples in this study are not sufficient to support these conclusions, but they do point to one potential, unanticipated outcome of intersetting communication – the schoolification (Moss, 2013) of preschool.

Feeling pressure to change preschool practice based on feedback from schools is an example of an unintended consequence of theory, policy and practice which encourages
Broström (2002) has suggested that preschool educators’ resistance to collaborating with schools around curriculum is due to a fear of being imposed upon by the school curriculum. Any pressure on preschools from schools or vice versa which is communicated through preschool-school interactions could be a source of relationship difficulties, especially if educators feel their way of working is under threat.

**Conclusion**

Previously, intersetting communication has been presumed in the literature, by policy makers and by practitioners to be a positive support for children’s transition to school through the development of working relationships between educators and the exchange of information about children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; DEECD, 2009; Dockett & Perry, 2006). In addressing the equation in the title of this paper, the results of this study indicate that preschool + school + communication = positive as well as negative outcomes for educators’ relationships. Although the questionnaire results are limited in terms of the depth of information they have provided about preschool-school communication, they have nonetheless given an indication of the wide range of actual outcomes of the practice. Educator’s experiences have been reported here: future research incorporating the perspectives of families and children will provide a broader understanding of the consequences of preschool-school communication.

This paper has reported the outcomes intended and anticipated by theory, policy and practice as well as unintended consequences. The results of this study add to the existing literature which has previously provided some detail of outcomes for children (Ahtola et al., 2011; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008), but has not highlighted the outcomes of preschool-school communication for educators themselves. In particular, there were many direct outcomes for relationships reported by educators. Potential implications for relationships related to other outcomes, such as influencing practice, have also been demonstrated in this paper. Given the assertion in the transition literature that relationships “influence children’s transition to school both directly and indirectly” (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p. 492), the results of this study indicate that intersetting communication has important results for relationships between educators; relationships that ultimately impact on children.

Positive relationships between preschool and school educators are vital in order for them to work together to support children and families during the time of their transition to school. Positive relationships themselves can be regarded as an outcome of a successful start to school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), yet this study has demonstrated that positive
relationships do not automatically or always result from communications between preschools and schools. Put another way, in some cases preschool + school + communication ≠ positive relationships. On this basis, it is recommended that educators, as well as policies guiding their practice, give consideration to the many potential results of intersetting communications, particularly in terms of relationships between educators. It is suggested that the practice of preschool-school communication be valued by educators and policy makers for its potential for affecting educator relationships as much as it is currently considered as a way of exchanging information between settings.

\[1\] ‘Preschool’ refers to the range settings in Australia which provide care and education programs for children the year before they start school. These include those more commonly referred to as ‘preschool’ as well as child care centres, family day care and mobile children’s services.

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