

PILOT EVALUATION OF THE  
AUSPARENTING IN SCHOOLS  
TRANSITION TO PRIMARY  
SCHOOL PARENT PROGRAM

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**Acknowledgements:**

The Parenting Research Centre would like to acknowledge the Catholic Education Office Melbourne schools who worked hard to involve families in the program, and engage them in completing questionnaires. We would also like to acknowledge the PRC research assistants who were instrumental in their assistance with data collection and data entry.

This study was supported by the Parenting Research Centre's Department of Human Services Funding Agreement.

Report prepared by the Parenting Research Centre, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2007

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## Executive Summary

### Aim

The aim was to find out whether the program was helpful to families in managing their children's transition. In particular we wanted to know whether attending the program:

- Decreased parents' worry and concern about their child's transition
- Increased their knowledge and confidence in managing the transition process

### Participants

Two hundred and twenty families from 6 schools in the NWMR participated. One hundred and five were involved in the program and there were 117 in the waitlist control group.

### Program

The program consisted of 5 sessions that were held at the primary schools. Three sessions were at the end of the year before the children started at school. The remaining two sessions were held at the beginning of the school year. Content included: Orientation to school, family involvement, managing transition, child development and learning, and parenting issues.

### Results

- One hundred and eight parents completed both pre and post measures.
- Following participation in the program, parents reported fewer worries and concerns about their children's transition to school than parents in the wait list group. Worry in the wait list group increased over time.
- There was a relationship between worry and concern and satisfaction in parenting. Parents who were more worried about their children's transition reported less satisfaction in their parenting role.

### Conclusion

This study was a critical preparatory phase for the Randomised Controlled Trial of the AusParenting in Schools program that is currently being conducted by PRC. It demonstrated that this is a promising program that deserves a more rigorous and extensive investigation. It also provided information that will improve the methodology of this important next study.

## Introduction

Most children and their families adjust well to starting primary school. However studies have shown that approximately 10-21% of children experience adjustment difficulties (Hausken & Rathbun, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000), including reluctance to go to school, complaints of being sick (Hausken & Rathbun, 2002), increased worries, fears, crying, temper tantrums, and showing negative attitudes towards school (Ladd & Price, 1987). Also, parents may feel unprepared for the transition process and how to help their child settle into school and may benefit from information and advice about how to help their child make a smooth transition into school. Assisting parents to help their children make a positive start to school is important as research shows that a successful transition into school is associated with future academic achievement (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Gutman, Sameroff, & Cole, 2003), stable peer relationships and increased school attendance (Ladd & Price, 1987).

Schools employ a range of transition practices including information and orientation sessions, to help children and parents become familiar with the new school environment. However, research shows that such practices have a modest effect on students' academic achievement and parent-initiated school involvement (Schulting, Malon, & Dodge, 2005). There is a lack of evaluation research into transition practices that focus on providing families with specific information and resources about managing the transition process and helping their child adjust to starting school. Therefore, the present study outlines the pilot evaluation of the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program designed to assist parents to help their children make a successful start to school.

### *The AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program*

The aims of the Transition to Primary School Parent Program are threefold: (a) to provide families with an opportunity to learn about strategies to help children adjust to starting school, (b) to promote family involvement in children's learning at home and school, and (c)

to begin the process of building family-school partnerships, and to promote the school as a place where families can go further information and support on the transition process and raising children. The content of the transition program is informed by research about child development, transition and parenting at this stage in a child and family's life. There are five sessions which take approximately two hours each. The first session is an orientation session for both parents and children together, while the remaining sessions are for parents only while their children spend time in the classroom engaged in activities typically run by teachers during orientation. Details about each of the sessions will now be provided. Sessions 1 to 3 are conducted before the school year starts and sessions 4 and 5 occur early in the new school year.

### *Session 1: School-Parent-Child Orientation*

The first session is an orientation for both parents and children. This session aims to involve parents in their children's learning right from the very beginning by inviting them to remain in the classroom with their children and teacher. In addition to increasing familiarity with the child's teacher and classroom, this sends the key message to parents that the school views them as partners in the education of their children, and that their involvement in the classroom is important, valued and encouraged. The common practice of parents leaving their children in the care of teachers can give a message contrary to this. In the session, parents and children are invited to look around the classroom, and to try a range of engaging activities that are fun and simple to do. Parents and children are also encouraged to walk around the school yard and play on the playground equipment.

### *Session 2: School Involvement*

This session focuses on the importance of parent involvement in their children's learning and development, and provides practical ideas about what parents can do to become involved in their children's learning both at home and school. Information about daily family routines, monitoring out-of-school activities, and having realistic expectations and positive attitudes to learning is offered. Parents are also encouraged to discuss how they would like to get involved, and the school may provide more

information about opportunities for involvement at the school (e.g., classroom helpers). The concept of parent-school partnerships is also explained and parents are informed of how the school can support them in their role as a parent and how they can work together to facilitate positive outcomes for their children. Promoting parent involvement is important given the research indicating that when parents are involved in their children's learning and development, there are positive academic, social, emotional and behavioural outcomes for children (Barnard, 2004; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Zellman & Waterman, 1998)

### *Session 3: Managing Transition*

This session aims to prepare parents for their child's transition into school by providing information about the transition process and children's common reactions to starting school. Practical information is offered about how parents can prepare their children for starting school, and strategies are explored to manage any adjustment difficulties that may arise.

### *Session 4: Child Development and Learning at School Entry*

This session begins by giving parents the opportunity to discuss how the transition process is going for them and their children, exemplifying the developmental diversity that children display. The different rates of development in children and the various factors that can influence a child's development are discussed. Activities are suggested that parents can do to enhance their children's physical, social, emotional, and language and learning development.

### *Session 5: Parenting*

This session also begins by giving parents an opportunity to discuss any current transition concerns. The remainder of the session encourages parents to explore and share information and strategies found to be helpful in parenting children through the transition period and in raising children more generally. The importance of accessing trustworthy, reliable and evidence-based information about parenting is discussed. Information about

parenting services, resources and more intensive parenting programs is provided.

### *Aims & Hypotheses*

The first aim of the study was to pilot the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program to evaluate its effectiveness in strengthening parent knowledge and confidence to manage the transition process, help their child settle into school, and encourage parent involvement in their children's learning and development. It was hypothesized that compared to families receiving the standard school transition program offered by schools (typically, a parent information session and at least two child only sessions), families receiving the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program would show (a) greater parent knowledge of the transition process and confidence in their ability to help their child adjust to starting school, (b) lower levels of worry and concern about the transition process, (c) greater parent involvement in their children's learning and development, and (d) greater sense of parenting confidence and satisfaction. It was expected that these preliminary findings would inform further development of the transition program. A second aim of the study was to assess the suitability of the recruitment and data collection procedures and outcome measures used before conducting a randomized controlled trial.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 222 families of children starting primary school in 2006 recruited from six Catholic primary schools in the Northern and Western metropolitan regions of Melbourne. There were 105 (47.3%) families from three schools who participated in at least 3 sessions of the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program (intervention condition), and 117 (52.7%) families from three schools received the standard school transition program (control condition).

Although 222 families completed the pre-test measures, a total of 108 completed pre-post data sets were available for data analysis, resulting in a final sample of 38 and 70 families for the intervention and control groups, respectively. To examine whether there were any differences between families who completed pre-test measures and those who complete pre- and post-test measures, independent sample *t*-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted on the continuous and categorical variables respectively (see Tables 1 and 2). Significant differences were observed for Parent's age, where parents who completed both pre- and post-test measures were significantly older than parents who completed the pre-test measures only,  $t(N=195)=-2.70, p=.008$ . Significant differences were also observed for the mean number of childcare settings children had attended before starting school, where children of parents who completed the pre-test measures only had attended significantly more childcare settings than children of parents who had completed both pre- and post-test measures,  $t(N=155.02)=2.71, p=.008$ .

Table 1

Participant characteristics - continuous demographic variables for parents who have completed pre-test measures only and parents who have completed both pre- and post-test measures

Variables	Parents who completed pre-test measures only (n=98)			Parents who completed both pre- and post-test measures (n=108)			
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	
Child's age (yrs)	97	5.03	0.61	108	5.04	0.51	
Parent's age (yrs)	92	34.47	5.49	105	36.54	5.28	**
No. of siblings in the family	82	1.52	0.91	93	1.34	0.83	
No. of pre-schools attended	89	1.17	0.64	103	1.06	0.46	
No. of childcare settings attended	85	1.16	0.99	98	0.81	0.76	**

\* $p<.05$  \*\*  $p<.01$

Table 2

Participant characteristics - categorical demographic variables for parents who have completed pre-test measures only and parents who have completed both pre- and post-test measures

Variables	Parents who completed pre-test measures only (n=98)	Parents who completed both pre- and post-test measures (n=108)
	n (%)	n (%)
No. of children with a disability	7 (7.1%)	2 (1.9%)
No. of children with a chronic health problem	5 (5.1%)	6 (5.6%)
Primary carer's relationship to child		
Mother	77 (78.6%)	91 (84.3%)
Father	16 (16.3%)	13 (12.0%)
Grandparent	-	1 (0.9%)
Language spoken at home		
English	78 (79.6%)	84 (80.8%)
Language other than English	20 (20.4%)	20 (18.5%)
Primary carer's level of education		
Not completed Year 12	11 (11.2%)	27 (25.0%)
Completed Year 12	25 (25.5%)	31 (28.7%)
Completed TAFE	21 (21.4%)	21 (19.4%)
Completed University Degree	34 (34.7%)	24 (22.2%)
Other	5 (5.1%)	1 (0.9%)
No. of Families receiving Educational Maintenance Allowance	4 (4.1%)	8 (7.4%)

Independent sample *t*-tests and chi-square analyses were also conducted to examine whether there were any differences between families in the intervention and waitlist groups who completed pre- and post- test measures on the demographic variables (see Tables 3 and 4). No significant differences between the groups on the demographic variables were observed.

Table 3  
Participant characteristics - continuous demographic variables for intervention and waitlist conditions

Variables	Intervention ( <i>n</i> =38)			Waitlist ( <i>n</i> =70)		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Child's age (yrs)	38	5.17	0.46	70	4.92	0.71
Parent's age (yrs)	37	36.32	5.30	68	36.71	5.32
No. of siblings in the family	33	1.39	0.83	60	1.32	0.83
No. of pre-schools attended	36	1.06	0.23	68	1.06	0.54
No. of childcare settings attended	35	0.89	0.72	64	0.75	0.77

Table 4  
Participant characteristics - categorical demographic variables for intervention and waitlist conditions

Variables	Intervention	Waitlist
	( <i>n</i> =38)	( <i>n</i> =70)
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Child's gender		
Male	14 (36.8%)	32 (45.7%)
Female	24 (63.2%)	35 (50%)
No. of children with a disability	-	2 (2.9%)
No. of children with a chronic health problem	3 (7.9%)	3 (4.3%)
Primary carer's relationship to child		
Mother	33 (86.8%)	59 (84.3%)
Father	4 (10.5%)	9 (12.9%)
Grandparent	-	1 (1.4%)
Language spoken at home		
English	31 (81.6%)	54 (77.0%)
Language other than English	6 (15.8%)	13 (18.6%)
Primary carer's level of education		
Not completed Year 12	5 (13.2%)	21 (30.0%)
Completed Year 12	11 (28.9%)	20 (28.6%)
Completed TAFE	9 (23.7%)	12 (17.1%)
Completed University Degree	10 (26.3%)	14 (20.0%)
Other	-	1 (1.4%)
No. of Families receiving Educational Maintenance Allowance	3 (7.9)	5 (7.1%)

## Measures

Parents completed questionnaires obtaining demographic information about their relationship to the child, the child's age, gender, and health information, language spoken at home, and education level. Parents also completed the following self-report measures.

*Parent Confidence in Managing the Transition to School* (PCMTS; Parenting Research and confidence to manage the transition period. Items 5-8 refer to parent worry and concern about managing the transition period. High scores represent high degrees of worry. Internal consistency for the current sample is .69 and .72 for the Parent Knowledge and Confidence and Parent Worry subscales, respectively.

*Parenting Sense of Competence Scale* (PSOC; Johnston & Mash, 1989). The PSOC is a 16-item self-report measure assessing parents' satisfaction and efficacy in their parenting role. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale. The Satisfaction subscale refers to parenting frustration, anxiety and motivation, while the Efficacy subscale assesses perceived competence, capability and problem-solving ability. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale with high scores indicating high degrees of satisfaction and efficacy in parenting. Internal consistency for the Efficacy subscale for the current sample at pre- and post-test was .75 and .82, respectively, while internal consistency for the Satisfaction subscale at pre- and post-test was .83 and .85.

*Parental role construction for involvement in their child's education – Part 1: Role activity beliefs* (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005) is a 10-item self-report measure assessing parents' beliefs about their responsibility to be involved in their children's education. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger beliefs about their responsibility for being involved. Internal consistency of .80 has been reported (Walker et al., 2005), and for the current sample was .77.

*Parents' Perceived Life Context - Knowledge and skills* (Walker et al., 2005) is a 9-item self-report measure assessing parents' perceived knowledge and skills related to parent involvement in their children's education. Items

Centre, 2006), is a 9-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure parents' confidence in managing their children's transition into primary school. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1=Strongly disagree to 6=Strongly Agree. There are two subscales: Parent Knowledge and Confidence, and Parent Worry. Items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 9 refer to parent knowledge and confidence in managing the transition process and supporting their child. High scores represent greater knowledge

are rated on a 6-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater knowledge and perceptions of their skills for parent involvement. Internal consistency of .83 has been reported (Walker et al., 2005), and for the current sample was .89.

## Procedure

Following ethics approval from the relevant ethics committees, six schools were approached and invited to participate in the AusParenting in Schools Program. The schools were randomly allocated to either the intervention or waitlist condition. At information sessions held at the schools in Term 4 of the year prior to the children starting the preparatory grade, families in both the intervention and waitlist conditions were informed of the purpose of the study and invited to participate. They were asked to complete the pre-measures about their confidence to manage the transition period and experiences of parenting during this time in their children's lives. Families having difficulties completing the survey were assisted by school staff or interpreter. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Families from the intervention schools participated in the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Program, while families from the waitlist schools participated in the routine transition practices employed by the schools. The first session of the Transition to Primary School Program was conducted by school staff, while the remaining four sessions were conducted by the AusParenting in Schools Project Team. The duration of each session was approximately 1.5 hours.

Post-measures were collected from parents in Term 1 of the following year, once the children

had started school. Parents in the intervention condition who attended the final transition session were asked to complete the survey. Parents who did not attend the final session, and those in the waitlist condition were sent the post-measures and asked to return to the school office. This survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

#### *Data Analysis*

Data was collated and analysed on a group basis using multivariate statistics. A series of 2x2 (Condition x Time) mixed design multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were conducted to assess treatment effects on the Parent Confidence in Managing the Transition to School, and Parenting Sense of Competence Scale. A between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess for differences among the intervention and waitlist control groups on the Parent Involvement subscales. Effect sizes have been reported where appropriate, with 0.01, 0.06 and 0.14 as small, medium and large effect sizes for  $\eta^2$ , respectively.

## **Results**

#### *Statistical Assumptions and Data Screening*

Data from all the dependent measures were screened to assess for violations of the assumptions for inferential statistics and missing data. The percentage of missing data was approximately 8% and 13% across variables for the intervention and waitlist conditions, respectively. These data were replaced with the series mean (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The K.S Lilliefors' tests of normality indicated that distributions on some dependent measures had some skewness ( $p < .001$ ). However, given the small sample sizes and the graphical normality plots showing that the data for all dependent measures were approximately normally distributed, no data transformation procedures were conducted. Finally, Levene tests conducted to test the homogeneity of variances between the intervention and waitlist groups revealed that the assumption was met for each of the outcome measures.

#### *Program Attendance*

The mean number of sessions attended by parents was 2.7, with approximately 50% of parents attending at least 3 sessions.

#### *Intervention Effects*

Descriptive statistics for the intervention and waitlist groups on each of the outcome variables are presented in Table 5.

Table 5  
Descriptive statistics for the intervention and waitlist groups on each of the outcome variables.

Dependent Variable	Intervention (n=38)				Waitlist (n=70)			
	Pre		Post		Pre		Post	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
PCMTS - Knowledge and confidence	24.84	2.70	24.95	3.38	24.79	2.92	25.24	2.35
PCMTS– Worry	11.70	4.31	10.55	4.22	11.19	4.05	12.19	4.83 *
PSOC – Satisfaction	38.39	7.42	33.29	5.43	39.48	7.92	34.20	6.11
PSOC – Efficacy	30.78	5.13	31.16	4.48	31.98	4.84	31.97	4.36
PSOC – Total	69.03	8.77	64.45	7.70	71.82	10.25	66.17	8.82
Parental Role Construction	-	-	46.39	5.32	-	-	48.59	4.99
Parent Involvement - Knowledge	-	-	45.58	5.87	-	-	45.80	4.84

\*  $p < .05$

A 2x2 mixed design MANOVA was conducted to assess for differences among the intervention and waitlist control groups on the pre- and post-test scores on the Parent Confidence in Managing the Transition to School subscales scores, Knowledge and Confidence and Worry. A significant interaction effect was observed, Wilks  $\Lambda = .94$ ,  $F(2, 105)=3.191$ ,  $p=.045$ , multivariate  $\eta^2 = .06$ . Follow-up univariate analyses revealed no significant main effect for Knowledge and Confidence,  $F(1, 106)=0.31$ ,  $p=.58$ ,  $\eta^2 = .003$ , indicating that parents in the intervention and waitlist conditions did not differ in their pre- and post-test scores on this subscale. However, a significant main effect for the Worry subscale was found,  $F(1, 106)=5.67$ ,  $p=.019$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ , indicating that the intervention and waitlist groups significantly differed in their pre- and post-test scores on this subscale.

To follow-up on the significant main effect for the Worry subscale, analysis of the simple main effects was conducted. Results revealed no significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores, or the intervention and waitlist groups on the Worry subscale. However, it is important to note that the difference between the pre- and post-test Worry subscale scores for the waitlist group was approaching significance  $F(2, 105)=2.80$ ,  $p=.065$ , indicating that there was an increase in worry about the transition period reported by the waitlist group over time. Furthermore, the difference between the intervention and waitlist groups on the post-test Worry subscale scores was approaching significance,  $F(2, 105)=2.11$ ,  $p=.083$ , indicating that at post-test the waitlist group experienced greater worry about the transition period than the intervention group. Figure 1 depicts the relationship between the intervention and waitlist groups at pre- and post-test on the Worry subscale scores.

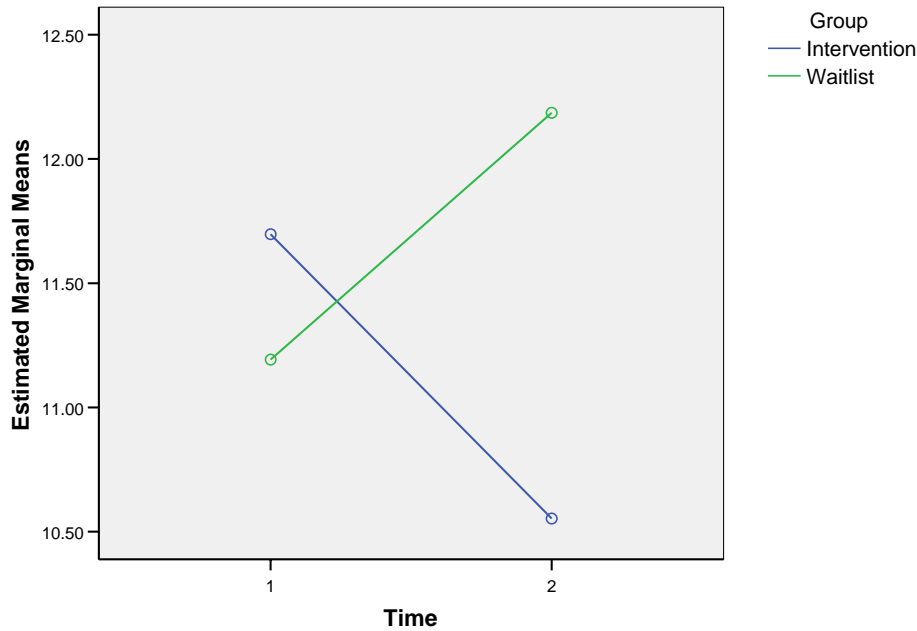


Figure 1  
The relationship between the intervention and waitlist groups at pre- and post-test on the Worry subscale.

A 2x2 mixed design MANOVA to assess for differences among the intervention and waitlist control groups on the pre- and post-test scores on the PSOC subscales revealed no significant multivariate results, Wilks  $\Lambda = .997$ ,  $F(2, 105) = .14$ ,  $p = .87$ , multivariate  $\eta^2 = .003$ , and no significant univariate results for the Satisfaction or Efficacy subscales,  $F(1, 106) = .033$ ,  $p = .88$ ,  $\eta^2 < .001$  and  $F(1, 106) = .268$ ,  $p = .61$ ,  $\eta^2 = .003$ , respectively.

Finally, a single-factor between-subjects MANOVA conducted to assess for differences among the intervention and waitlist control groups on the Parent Involvement subscales revealed no significant results, Wilks  $\Lambda = .957$ ,  $F(2, 105) = 2.36$ ,  $p = .10$ , multivariate  $\eta^2 = .043$ .

#### Other Important Findings

To examine for relationships among the pre-test measures, bivariate correlation analyses were conducted (see Table 6). Results revealed a significant relationship between the PCMTS- Knowledge and confidence subscale scores and PSOC – Efficacy subscale scores,  $r(N=67) = .33$ ,  $p = .006$ , indicating that parents who report greater knowledge and confidence to manage the transition to school are more confident in overall parenting than parents who report low knowledge and confidence to manage the transition to school. There was also a significant relationship between the PCMTS-Knowledge and confidence subscale scores and Parent Involvement- Knowledge and skills scores,  $r(N=77) = .31$ ,  $p = .006$ , indicating that parents who report more knowledge and skills to be involved in their children's education are also more confident in managing the transition to school.

The PCMTS-Worry subscale was significantly correlated with the PSOC-Satisfaction subscale,  $r(N=77)=-.58$ ,  $p<.001$ , whereby parents who reported greater worry and concern about managing the transition also reported that they were less satisfied in their parenting role. The PCMTS-Worry subscale was also significantly correlated with the Parent Involvement-Knowledge and skills scale,  $r(N=77)=-.44$ ,  $p<.001$ , whereby parents who reported less knowledge and skills to be involved in their children's education also reported greater worry and concern for managing the transition period.

The Parent Involvement – Knowledge and skills subscale was also significantly correlated with the PSOC Satisfaction and efficacy subscales and Parental Role Construction,  $r(N=77)=.24$ ,  $p=.03$ ,  $r(N=67)=.28$ ,  $p=.02$ , and  $r(N=77)=.39$ ,  $p<.001$ , respectively. This indicates that parents who report greater knowledge and skills to be involved in their children's education are also more likely to report that they are satisfied and confident in their overall parenting, and view parent involvement as part of their parenting role.

Table 6  
Correlations among the pre-test measures ( $N=77$ )

Pre-test Measures	1	2	3	4	5
1 PCMTS - Knowledge and confidence	-				
2 PCMTS– Worry	-.20	-			
3 PSOC – Satisfaction	.05	-.58 ***	-		
4 PSOC – Efficacy	.33 <sup>a**</sup>	-.20 <sup>a</sup>	.22 <sup>a</sup>	-	
5 Parental Role Construction	-.09	.003	-.01	.18 <sup>a</sup>	-
6 Parent Involvement – Knowledge and skills	.31 **	-.40 ***	.24 *	.28 <sup>a*</sup>	.39 ***

<sup>a</sup>  $N=67$

\* $p<.05$  \*\*  $p<.01$  \*\*\* $p<.001$

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program in strengthening parent knowledge and confidence to manage the transition process, help their child settle into school, and encourage parent involvement in their children's learning and development. The hypotheses stating that families receiving the transition program would report (a) greater parent knowledge of the transition process and confidence in their ability to help their child adjust to starting school (b) strengthened knowledge of the importance of parent involvement in their children's learning and development, and (c) greater sense of parenting confidence and satisfaction compared to families receiving routine transition practices was not supported. However, the hypothesis stating that families receiving the transition program would report lower levels of worry and concern about the transition process compared to families receiving routine transition practices was supported. These findings will now be discussed in more detail.

The present findings suggest that the transition program was effective in addressing parents' worries and concerns about managing their children's transition into school. Worry and concern about the transition period reported by parents in the waitlist condition had increased over time compared to parents who received the intervention program. This indicates that the transition program may serve to provide parents with ideas and strategies about how they can manage this time, potentially preventing the development of worries or concerns about helping their children make a smooth transition to school and managing any adjustment difficulties they may experience. This is particularly important as anxiety and worry may serve to undermine parent confidence to manage transition and overall parenting. Nevertheless, results in the current

study revealed no significant relationships between parent worry and concern about managing transition, and parent confidence to manage the transition period or parenting confidence in general. However, it was found that parents who reported more worry about the transition period also reported less satisfaction in parenting.

Despite the increased worry for parents in the waitlist condition, findings showed that there was no difference in parent knowledge and confidence to manage transition, and confidence and satisfaction in parenting generally between the groups over time. Although parenting self-efficacy theory suggests that emotional arousal such as stress and anxiety associated with adverse situational factors may influence perceptions of one's ability to successfully manage these situations (Bandura, 1989), parent worry about their children starting school is generally transient and short lived, and it is likely that it takes time for the effect of worry and anxiety to undermine parent confidence. Furthermore, given that worry about transition to school is context specific, it is unlikely that these worries would undermine overall parenting confidence. This is supported by the findings of this study, indicating no significant relationship between parenting worry and concern about transition and overall parenting confidence at pre-test. Finally, it is also important to note, that few parents attended sessions 4 and 5, which were about general parenting strategies for raising children, and therefore, it may not be expected that confidence and satisfaction in overall parenting would change.

Finally, results showed that there were no significant differences between the groups in parents' knowledge about parent involvement, and perceptions of their role in their children's learning and development. There are several explanations for this. First, the pre-test scores about parent involvement were high for both groups, indicating that parents already had a good understanding about their role in their children's learning and development, and the

benefits of being involved for children. Interestingly, results also showed that parents who report greater knowledge and skills to be involved in their children's education are also more confident in managing the transition period and overall parenting, are less worried about transition, more satisfied in their overall parenting, and believe that it is part of their parenting role to be involved in their children's education. Second, many families may have children already at school and have developed a sense of what their role is in their children's learning and development. Further research may want to investigate differences between families with children starting school for the first time, with no other children at school, and those with school beginners and children already attending school. This would provide insight into the specific needs of parents who are experiencing the transition to school for the first time.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

Before discussing the implications of the current research for future program development and research, there are several methodology limitations of the study worth noting. First, the program evaluation did not include measures of child adjustment. Given that the primary aim of the transition program is to facilitate a smooth transition for children, it is critical that future evaluations assess the impact of the transition program on child outcomes such as adjustment to school and school readiness. Second, the small sample size due to incomplete pre- and post- data sets limited statistical analysis, and the need to account for important factors which may influence program outcomes, such as socio-economic status, number of children already at school past attendance at childcare or preschool, and cultural and linguistic diverse background status. Third, given that the pre-test scores on most outcome measures were high for both groups, it is possible that the sample may have been skewed, whereby parents completing the measures may

generally be more confident in their parenting, managing transition, and involved in their children's learning and development than those who did not complete the measures. Finally, no parent satisfaction data was available to evaluate the acceptability of the transition program. It was anticipated that parent satisfaction surveys would be distributed in the final session of the transition program, however, the majority of parents did not attend this session. Therefore, it is proposed that future evaluations will collect parent satisfaction surveys after each session of the transition program to assess the usefulness of the content in each session for parents.

#### *Implications of the Study*

*Recommendations for further program development.* Several recommendations for further development of the Transition to Primary School Parent Program are offered. First, it is proposed that the number of sessions in the program is reduced from five to four. The pilot evaluation showed that the first three sessions offered in Term 4 were well attended, while very few parents attended the final two sessions in Term 1 the following year. These findings underscore the importance of timing in providing parenting information and support. It is evident that parents of children starting school are most receptive to information and support about transition the year before their children start school. This is a time when they are seeking information about the transition process and how to manage the challenges brought about by this time in their child's development. Once children start school and settle in, and the adjustments to family time and routines are made in Term 1, parents may not see the need to attend sessions about the transition process. Nevertheless, it is recommended that at least one session is offered in Term 1 to offer parents with continuing concerns an opportunity to receive further information and support to help their children and family adjust

to starting school. Further to this, the sessions in Term 4 may be better attended as parents may make specific arrangements to take their children in for the school transition sessions, whereas in Term 1 parents may have returned to work or other commitments now that their child has settled into a routine of going to school.

Second, consideration for engaging parents who did not attend the transition sessions is needed. Reasons for not attending sessions should be investigated, such as parent perceptions of not needing to attend because of older children who have already been through the process of transition, work commitments, transport problems, parental health and wellbeing difficulties and so on. Identifying reasons for non-attendance would provide important information about how schools may be able to overcome some of these barriers. This is particularly important for engaging families experiencing difficulties and those who have limited support.

Third it is proposed that more specific strategies in managing school resistance and refusal are included in the program. Although the transition program focused on providing practical information about how to help prepare children for the challenges of starting school (e.g., adjusting to a new environment, family routines and greater expectations of social and self-help skills), parents asked for additional information and strategies about how to manage school resistance and refusal behaviours in their children, such as crying, clinginess, and somatic complaints.

Fourth, it is recommended that training in use of the program is provided for school personnel. This will serve to build school capacity to provide transition programs for parents in the future. A co-facilitation training model is proposed, whereby nominated school personnel participate in a workshop to become familiar with the program content and materials, followed by co-facilitated delivery of the sessions with a member of the project

team experienced in delivering the program. This model offers school's with an opportunity to receive immediate support in use of the program, and therefore, may serve to strengthen school personnel's confidence to deliver the program in the future.

Finally, greater consideration for the needs of families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds experiencing the transition to school is required. In addition to ensuring families with access to interpreters and translated materials, schools may benefit from information about how they adapt the program content to meet the information and support needs of these families. Sessions may focus on providing more practical information about starting school such as how teachers teach, the type of classroom activities children participate in, and ideas for what goes in school lunchboxes. Families new to Australia and unfamiliar with the education system in Australia may benefit from discussing their experiences of schooling in their home country and exploring how this might be different in Australia. Schools can also be linked into community organisations such as Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and Foundation House who can provide additional information and resources about supporting refugee and new arrival families in schools.

*Recommendations for conducting research in schools.* Research in schools can put additional demands on staff responsible for their schools involvement in the project. Therefore, it is recommended that schools are provided with adequate assistance to ensure that project tasks such as data collection are completed. For instance, schools may benefit from (a) resources to promote the Transition to Primary School program, (b) instructions and strategies for distributing and collecting surveys, (c) clear timelines for data collection, and (d) pre-prepared verbal and written explanations for informing parents about the program and surveys. Such assistance may improve parent attendance at the program sessions and increase survey return rates.

*Recommendations for further research evaluation.* This pilot evaluation was conducted to trial the Transition to Primary School program and evaluation procedures. Following this evaluation, several recommendations for further evaluation of the program are offered. First, it is strongly recommended that future evaluations of the Transition to Primary School program collect data pertaining to child adjustment outcomes. The present study only measured parent outcomes such as knowledge, confidence and worry in managing the transition to school, and overall sense of parenting confidence and satisfaction. By assisting parents to manage the transition to school it is anticipated that this will help their children make a successful start to school and promote positive adjustment outcomes at this time. Future evaluations may include both parent and teacher reports of child adjustment and readiness for school, as well as measures of social emotional, behavioural and academic functioning.

Second, data collection procedures for schools need to be improved to maximize the parent survey return rates, particularly at post-evaluation. This may be achieved by providing additional assistance to schools to make the data collection process as easy as possible. Furthermore, asking parents to complete and return surveys at a naturally occurring event at the school, rather than sending them home and asking them to return them at a later date may also be a more effective way of increasing survey return rates. This is important as with greater sample sizes more complex statistical analyses can be conducted. For instance, the present study could have been improved by accounting for factors that may influence the transition outcomes such as socio-economic status, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, number of children in the family already attending school and past attendance at childcare or preschool.

Finally, as mentioned above, it is recommended that participant satisfaction data is collected at the end of every program

session rather than at the end of the program. Assessing participant satisfaction is an important step in the development and evaluation of new interventions (Foster & Mash, 1999; Matthews & Hudson, 2001). This information will provide important information about the strengths, weaknesses and usefulness of each session to inform future program development.

### *Conclusions*

In summary, the results of this pilot study indicate that the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program is effective in addressing parents' worries and concerns about managing their children's transition to school. The current pilot study also provides important information that will inform the future development and evaluation of the program. This is seen as a critical step toward developing evidence-based transition programs to promote the wellbeing of children and families negotiating this time.

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