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THE BIG IDEA

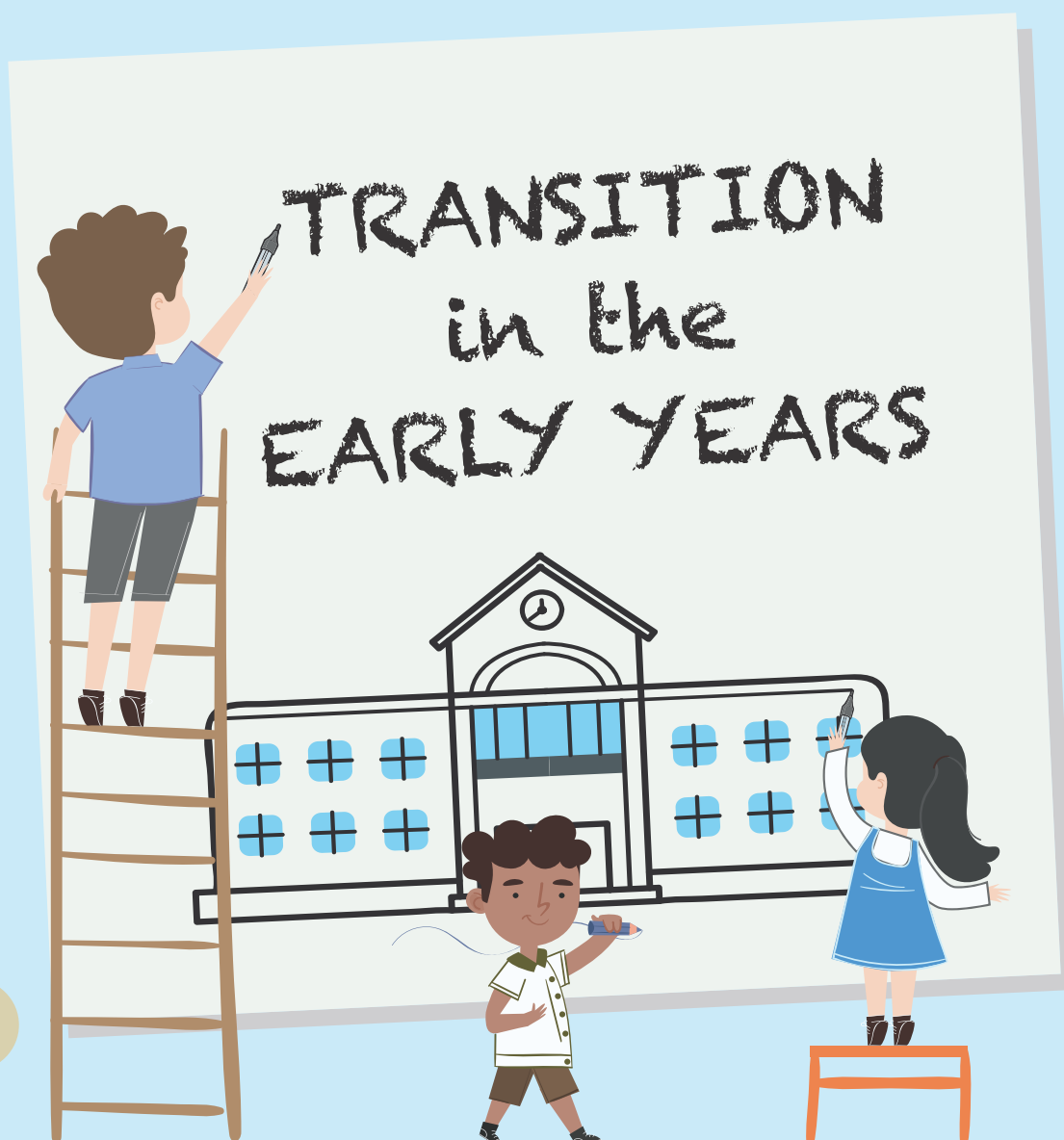
Supporting Successful Transitions
in the Early Years

CLASSROOM PERSPECTIVES

Preparing Preschoolers
for Transition

PEOPLE

Connecting the Dots for
Effective School Transition



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Connecting the Dots for Effective School Transition

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Associate Professor Kenneth Poon

Associate Dean (Education Research)
Co-Director, Centre for Research in Child Development
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The transition from kindergarten to primary school is a huge milestone for both children and their parents. In preparing children for this, emphasis has to be given to the pre-transition period—namely the preschool years—when schools introduce and equip young children with the foundational skills such as creativity, independence and routines, to name a few, for primary school.

Local and international research have also shown that the preschool experience can significantly facilitate a child's transition in various ways. This includes the academic, social and emotional aspects of the transition that children experience. The provision of quality support and structure can make a positive impact for these young children as they prepare for the “big move”.

However, for a holistic and successful transition to occur, there also has to be appropriate support at the other side. Primary school teachers play a significant role in receiving these children as they first step foot into the primary school scene. And it doesn't just end there—parental support and involvement are also crucial factors that influence, to a large extent, the child's ability and confidence to cope with the changes that occur during the transition period.

This issue of *SingTeach* delves deeper into the point of views of education researchers, kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers and of course, the parents as they share more about their experiences in supporting children before, during and after their transition period. We also feature one NIE research study that explores the links between children's self-regulation skills and academic outcomes in *Self-Regulation for Positive Schooling Experiences* on page 6.

As a researcher, educator, psychologist and parent, it is only my hope that our Singaporean children experience a positive kindergarten to primary school transition that will facilitate their first steps into the formal education journey for many years to come. As every child will experience many transitions throughout their growing-up years, a successful kindergarten transition is one good step towards a successful transition for life! ■

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

CONTRIBUTION

Transition of Preschool Children to Primary One
by Lucy Quek, Dean of Curriculum and Programmes
(National Institute of Early Childhood Development)



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SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL

transitions

IN THE EARLY YEARS



Transition is the process in which an individual encounters a move into a new environment that requires him or her to adapt to an unfamiliar setting. In the context of early childhood education, transition occurs when a child moves from preschool to primary school. Often, this is seen as a stressful period for both the children and their parents as they navigate new territories, but must it really be that way? The Guest Editor of this issue, Associate Professor Kenneth Poon, highlights the three key players who play an important role in successful transitions—preschool teachers, primary school teachers and the parents.

Changes are ubiquitous; we experience them as we travel through our life course. Similarly, in early childhood, children are exposed to multiple changes in a day. The presence of routines and structures, however, will help make most of those changes manageable for them.

One major change that most local children under the age of seven face is the transition from kindergarten to primary school.

Why Transitions May Stress Children

“Along with these transitions often comes quite significant changes in the child’s environment. The changes are not only in the physical environments but also in the learning and social environments,” explains Associate Professor Kenneth Poon, who is also Co-Director of the Centre for Research in Child Development at the National Institute of Education (NIE).

While it is almost universal that all preschools in Singapore operate with the mission of preparing children for formal primary school education in mind, the extent to which these children are prepared for this move varies from school to school.

One of the most challenging issues that children face when entering primary school is the concept of self-regulation. Oftentimes, these children struggle to self-regulate their behaviour and have trouble expressing their emotions in a manner considered appropriate for their age.

There are also many other aspects of change that children may experience during the transition process. This includes the increased student-to-teacher ratio, the large number of students in the school, and even the sheer size of the furniture. While these may sound like trivial matters to adults, they can get very overwhelming for children.

“The changes that children face may vary widely from routines, expectations, adults, and peers,” Kenneth shares. “There is undoubtedly the academic change too but fortunately, our primary school system starts out at a comfortable point for the vast majority of our children.”

As such, what can be done to minimize the non-academic aspect of stress in these children so that they may experience a smoother transition to primary school?

Tripartite Partnership for Successful Transitions

“The transition from kindergarten to primary school is very much like a ‘handshake’ in which the preschool teachers prepare the child while the primary school receives the child,” Kenneth says.

During lessons, many of these preschools will often make references as to what happens in primary schools. This helps children to anticipate what they could possibly experience later on. “Some preschools even bring the children out for field trips to primary schools just to help prepare them for the change,” Kenneth shares.

Meanwhile, Singapore primary schools establish specific structures when receiving their primary one students. This includes employing the “buddy system” in which they are individually paired with older students from the school in an effort to provide them with the basic guidance (how to navigate their way around school and make food purchases during recess time, for example) during their first few weeks in school.

Kenneth notes that for a smooth transition to occur, the children’s families also play a crucial role in the entire transition process. This includes being actively involved in bringing the child to orientation programmes and, back at home, communicating to the child about the concept of primary school.

“What parents tell their children is important. Do they talk about primary school being a scary place to be at or do they describe it as a place full of new curiosities and experiences? What is

being communicated to the child can shape how the child feels about moving on to primary school,” explains Kenneth.

“As such, an effective partnership between these three stakeholders—preschool teachers, primary school teachers and families—will facilitate a smooth transition. If any party is less engaged, it can potentially make the transition process more stressful for the child.”

Supporting Transitions through Research

While a smooth transition involves a partnership of the three elements, much can also be done in the area of research to identify and address possible gaps.

To further support transitions in the early years, NIE, under the Education Research Funding Programme managed by the Office of Education Research, conducts various research studies related to this area.

“In particular, the *Singapore Kindergarten Impact Project* (SKIP) has allowed us to better understand how children progress from kindergarten to primary school,” Kenneth, who is one of the Co-Principal Investigators of SKIP, shares. “This project helps us identify the different pathways of children’s development as they transit.”

As many teachers and parents would agree, transition can be a stressful process for the child, but must it really be that way? For Kenneth, that is not always necessary *if* the appropriate support and active partnership are present. As he simply puts it: “This brings us back to the adage of *it takes a village to raise a child*.” It definitely does! ■



Kenneth Poon is Associate Professor at the Early Childhood and Special Needs Education Academic Group at NIE. He also serves as Co-Director of the Centre for Research in Child Development and Associate Dean (Education Research) at the Office of Education Research. Trained as a clinical psychologist and as an early interventionist, Kenneth has spent the past 20 years of experience working with persons with neurodevelopmental disabilities.



SELF-REGULATION

FOR POSITIVE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

The ability to self-regulate can go a long way in helping children manage the transition from preschool to primary school. We speak to an NIE Research Scientist to learn more about the importance of self-regulation and how it impacts children's academic and socioemotional outcomes.

By the time children enter primary school, they are expected to be able to stay focused during lessons, be more autonomous in their learning as well as interact well with teachers and classmates.

So what do these developmental milestones have in common and why are they important?

According to Dr Ng Ee Lynn, a Research Scientist with NIE's Centre for Research in Child Development, these milestones are linked to children's ability to self-regulate and have implications for their ability to adjust to a new school environment.

Self-Regulation and Child Development

"Self-regulation is essentially the ability to manage one's own emotions, thoughts and behaviours," Ee Lynn explains.

For her ongoing study on the relationship between self-regulation skills and children's academic and socioemotional outcomes in primary school, Ee Lynn is interested in two aspects of self-regulation—executive functioning (EF) and effortful control (EC).

While EF concerns a child's ability to engage in goal-directed thought and action (e.g., inhibit distractions), EC is about how well children can use their attentional resources to suppress a behavioural or emotional response that is inappropriate within a given situation.

"Generally, children with good self-regulation skills are better able to manage the transition from preschool to primary school and more likely to have positive learning experiences," Ee Lynn shares.

This is because the ability to self-regulate enables children to stay focused during lessons and build positive relationships with their peers and teachers, both of which contribute to positive academic and socioemotional outcomes.

Measuring Self-Regulation in Children

A series of games can be administered to children to assess their ability to self-regulate and scores are awarded to children based on their respective performance in these activities.

"There is a game called 'Heads-Toes-Knees-Shoulders', which requires children to perform an action that does not align with

the command. For example, when instructed to ‘touch your head’, children are actually supposed to touch their toes and vice versa,” shares Ee Lynn.

“If children are able to execute an action that is different (e.g., touch their toes) from what they will automatically do (e.g., touch their head), they are deemed to have good self-regulation skills,” Ee Lynn explains.

Another game is termed the “statue task”. “Children are asked to stand still for 90 seconds with their eyes closed. During this time, game administrators will make sudden noises and observe whether the children open their eyes or make any movement,” Ee Lynn elaborates.

“If children are able to inhibit their innate tendency to find out the source of the noise (i.e., distractors) and not make any movement, they are deemed to have better self-regulation skills.”

Although these games can help identify children with good and poor self-regulation skills, Ee Lynn highlights that such categorizations are in fact relative rather than absolute.

“For my study, we consider those with scores in the bottom 25th percentile of all children assessed to have poor self-regulation skills,” Ee Lynn adds.

Poor Self-Regulation—Risk Factors and Implications

Children develop self-regulation skills over a long period of time and one of the key factors that influences this development is the environment they grow up in.

“Many studies have found that socioeconomic disadvantages and an unstable family environment put children at greater risk of having poor self-regulation skills,” shares Ee Lynn. “One reason for this is that children who grow up under such conditions, unlike their more privileged peers, often lack the support that is needed from the adults around them (e.g., their parents) to help them develop the ability to self-regulate.”

Given that there is a direct relationship between self-regulation and a child’s ability to adjust and do well in school, can it be presumed that children with poor self-regulation skills will necessarily experience poorer outcomes? According to Ee Lynn, it would be premature to arrive at any conclusions at this stage.

“Presently, there are few studies that have actually followed children with poor self-regulation skills over a period of time to find out whether they really struggle throughout primary school and experience detrimental academic and socioemotional outcomes,” she explains.

Ee Lynn thus hopes that her ongoing study will provide some insight on the impact of poor self-regulation skills on children’s academic and socioemotional outcomes, and whether there are any factors that may mitigate the impact of poor self-regulation skills.



The Journey of Self-Regulation

Some children may be better able to self-regulate than others, but Ee Lynn believes that at the end of the day, self-regulation is a quality that can be cultivated.

What, then, can be done to help children develop good self-regulation skills?

“For a start, preschools can consider setting the development of self-regulation skills as a learning objective within the curriculum,” Ee Lynn suggests. “After all, preschool is a time when children’s self-regulation skills are developing rapidly so this is an opportune period to not only teach children to manage their emotions and inhibit distractions, but also provide intervention to those who exhibit signs of poor self-regulation.”

Another strategy is to create opportunities for children to practise their self-regulation skills, whether at home or at school. “This can include getting children to collaborate with their peers, training them to inhibit distractions, or having teachers guide them in managing negative emotions that may arise in the classroom,” Ee Lynn elaborates.

Ultimately, when children have good self-regulation skills, they are not only better positioned to manage the transition to primary school, but are also more likely to have positive educational experiences. ■



Ng Ee Lynn is a Research Scientist with NIE’s Centre for Research in Child Development. She is Principal Investigator of the *Singapore Kindergarten Impact Project (SKIP)*, a large-scale early childhood research study involving children across multiple pre-schools in Singapore. Her research interests lie in understanding the role of internal (e.g., self-regulation) and external factors (e.g., quality of the child’s learning environment, teacher well-being) on children’s learning.

LISTEN TO CHILDREN'S VOICES

Voices refers to children's words and actions. Pay close attention to their ideas and thoughts, behaviours and actions, and feelings and emotions. Listening to them allows us to understand their experiences better, and work out who feels comfortable and who may need support.

1

SEEK TO UNDERSTAND DIFFERENT ADULT'S VOICES

Parents and teachers may have different perspectives on various aspects of transition. It is crucial to recognize, acknowledge, understand and value similar and diverse views to enable all parties to work on solutions that are meaningful to everyone involved.

2

PROVIDE PRESCHOOL CHILDREN WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPERIENCE CHALLENGES

The changes that occur during the transition can present children with multiple challenges. Thus, preparing them for primary school means preparing them to face and negotiate these challenges. As such, teachers and parents can support children to face them by providing them with opportunities to experience some of these challenges in their early years.

3

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Find out what two of the authors of this book have to share about effective school transition on page 14 of this issue!

ARDS TIVE SITION RIENCE

6

PRIORITIZE “SETTLING IN” TO FOSTER CHILDREN’S SOCIOEMOTIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

When adults support children to settle in, we help them become familiar and comfortable with their new environment. Settling in contributes to the social and emotional adjustments that are necessary for a successful transition to primary school.

5

ACKNOWLEDGE CHILDREN’S, PARENTS’ AND TEACHERS’ CONCERNS

Strive to listen and acknowledge a child’s, parent’s or teacher’s concern related to the child’s transition instead of brushing it aside. Doing the latter may send a signal that the person’s concern is not important, which may lead to dire consequences. Instead, listen and strive to transform concerns to goals that everyone involved can work towards together.

4

PROVIDE PRESCHOOL CHILDREN WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPERIENCE FAMILIAR CONTINUITY

It is crucial that the change in the new environment is not too overwhelming for children. Allowing them to experience things they are familiar with (during their preschool years) allows them to draw on the familiar and use their knowledge to make sense of the new environment. This can help children continue to expand and extend their skills, knowledge and dispositions.

Acknowledgement

All information in this infographic derives from the book “Supporting children in their transition to Primary 1: A guide for teachers and parents in Singapore” published by the Early Childhood and Special Needs Education Academic Group at the National Institute of Education, Singapore.

Preparing PRESCHOOLERS for TRANSITION



Will my child be able to cope academically? Will my child be able to catch up with his or her peers in primary school? These are some common questions parents have during a child's school transition years. However, according to Dr Jacqueline Chung, Academic Director and Senior Principal of St. James' Preschool Services, matters pertaining to academia should not be the primary concern. Instead, the focus should be placed on understanding the child's social and emotional challenges, and how to best address them during the period of early childhood transition.

Fear of the Unknown

"During the transition period, it is really about all the questions that children will have in anticipation of the unknown," Jacqueline shares. "It is the *where do I, what do I and how do I* kind of questions that will arise."

Much like adults transiting to a new workplace, children also worry about the unknown which may inadvertently introduce apprehension and fear in them. As such, the role of preschool teachers in answering these questions becomes crucial during this period of change.

"If we are able to answer these questions or at least attempt to anticipate some of them, these children may be able to transit to primary schools with greater confidence," explains Jacqueline. "Their concerns will be less of a challenge if they are mentally and emotionally more ready."

And that sparked Jacqueline's impetus to start a transition component within the K2 curriculum at St. James' Church Kindergarten in 2013.

The Transition Programme

"I think it is important to know that preschool children come from a different world and experience. A transition period is needed in order for them to walk across that bridge to the new world," Jacqueline shares.

Through the years, Jacqueline has collected stories, information and data that has informed the programme by communicating and engaging with the teachers, children and families in her school. With this rich supply of information, Jacqueline began her quest to address their concerns through their kindergarten years with the end-goal of developing children who are ready for transition when the time arrives.

In particular, Jacqueline focuses on the social, emotional and environmental aspects of transition.

"We look into how children manage their time, how they communicate with people, how they navigate social spaces and how they adjust to new processes," explains Jacqueline. "As educators, we take a holistic view and attempt to engage the children in these areas."

Self-Regulation Skills

Most parents may ask: “What are the differences between the preschool and primary school classroom environment?” One major adjustment is the children’s freedom of movement and expression. Many children in preschool are accustomed to moving around freely, and sharing their thoughts and feelings with their peers and teachers in the classroom.

In contrast, the primary school environment often may entail children having to sit still and be quiet. The demand to self-regulate doubtlessly proves to be challenging for both the children and the primary school teachers alike.

“Imagine that the children are often encouraged to speak up and share their thoughts and feelings, but suddenly in primary school, that may not always be welcomed, for various reasons,” Jacqueline says.

As such, Jacqueline makes it a point to constantly remind the children that while they should still continue to speak up and share their thoughts in primary school, they also have to remember that the class group is much bigger than the one they are in now. “So the children are reminded to understand and not be too upset if their teacher has no time to listen to everything they have to say,” she adds.

Effective Communicator

Ofentimes, young children find that crying or reacting negatively is the most effective and quickest way to express their emotions when they struggle to verbalize them.

To help children express themselves more effectively, the transition programme guides children to solve problems in an age-appropriate manner. “We let them know that while they may be upset over something that happened, just crying will not solve the problem,” Jacqueline shares.

For example, if children get reprimanded by the teacher for certain actions, instead of crying or remaining silent, Jacqueline encourages them to communicate to the teacher, in a respectful manner, the details surrounding the incident. The programme instills in the children the value of being active learners who take responsibility for their own actions and are able to explain why certain things happened.

At the same time, Jacqueline also implores teachers to listen to and understand the child if the explanation is valid. “If you feel that some children have challenging needs, then as educators, we ought to find out how to support these children instead of merely scolding them, which may instill fear in them.”

“Everyone learns better when he or she is not afraid and feels secure. As early childhood educators, we are educating the whole child; we are not just teaching knowledge, we are developing children.”

Socially Confident

The rules of engagement in primary schools can be challenging for new students to traverse. Engagement involves the children interacting with the different people in school and being able to switch modes of communication depending on whom they speak to.

“These children enter a whole new social space where there are so many people with different roles and functions so they need to understand who these people are, what their roles are, and how to interact with them accordingly,” Jacqueline explains.

The programme encourages children to learn to observe and ask questions to identify the people they see in school. The highlight at the end of K2 is a graduation camp during which the children participate in a simulated tuck shop to accustom themselves to the concept of buying food. Exposure to role-playing helps children familiarize with likely scenarios by providing them with strategies for their transition.

“Our preparation must be long-term so we have to help children to plan and think beyond just the academic aspects of transition,” Jacqueline says. Ultimately, it is her hope that the children in her 12 preschools will experience a positive transition period through the school’s transition programme aptly called *From K2 to P1*.



Jacqueline Chung is the Academic Director and Senior Principal at St. James’ Preschool Services, overseeing St. James’ Church Kindergarten and Little Seeds Preschools. She holds a PhD in early childhood education and is an Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) Fellow. Jacqueline conducts workshops and talks on a variety of topics surrounding the visual arts, music, language & literacy, learning environments, mentoring and leadership.

What About Transition?

The Voices of Three Individuals

For a positive transition to occur, it is important that the child receives proper support from the people around him or her. But who are these people? In this section, one preschool teacher and primary school teacher share more about how they prepare, receive and support the child. One mother of a child with learning needs also shares her concerns and fears on the transition process.



As a *preschool teacher*, how do you help children who need more support as compared to their peers that do not, as they prepare for transition to Primary One?



Chua Bee Lain
Head of Kindergarten 2
St. James' Church Kindergarten

// First, I would like to qualify that I am specifically referring to support in the area of socioemotional development.

Usually, some signs would have surfaced consistently from the start of our contact point with them. Some may exhibit problems regulating between transitions, speaking up during discussion sessions or may be even too shy to express their needs.

We work with the parents to observe and understand better how they are at home via tele-conferencing. We allow time for them to settle into K2 from K1, especially when they find it challenging due to different expectations and a mix of new friends. I find that these children can be more independent in terms of handling their personal belongings, speaking up and getting to know new friends.

What works for me is getting to know each individual child, his or her learning style, interests, strengths and the family. The purpose is to establish a strong relationship with the child and build his or her

confidence. In our daily interactions with them, we consistently use positive words associated with learning dispositions such as “keep trying” and “never give up”. This will help them know that they can teach themselves to learn new things, it is fine to make mistakes, and together we can learn to make things right.

At St. James' Church Kindergarten, we devote one term (about nine weeks) to talk about this transition. We elicit their prior knowledge, and provoke them to share what they want to know about primary school. We engage them to contribute to their learning by having them generate solutions to manage these changes. In this way, we empower them to own their learning, build them as independent learners ready to share their voices through their thoughts and ideas. ■

As a *parent of a child with learning needs*, what are your top most concerns about your child's eventual transition into primary school? What do you hope can be done to address those concerns?

" I have a daughter who is currently in preschool and attending the Early Intervention Programme for Infants & Children (EIPIC) three times a week, on top of her regular school hours. Diagnosed with Global Developmental Delay, EIPIC aims to equip my daughter with as much skills—both hard and soft—to allow her a better chance to catch up in school now, and if and when she enters primary school.

As a mother, I hope that she would be able to enter a regular primary school instead of one that specializes in children with learning needs. It isn't that the latter is necessarily a bad thing—it's just that I hope she gets the **opportunity to experience** formal primary education much like how her current peers in preschool eventually can.

However, I also fear that in entering primary school, my daughter will struggle to cope because of how different the setting is when compared to preschool. *Will she be independent enough to go to the washroom when she needs to? Will she be able to make food purchases in the canteen during recess?* But most of all, I wonder: *Will her teachers outcast and categorize her as "special needs"?*

I think it is important that teachers do not label children who struggle with their day-to-day work as "slow" because along with labelling comes differential treatment, which is often associated with negative treatment. Instead, what I hope is that teachers can be more patient towards all children and pay more attention to those

who needs it in a subtle manner. It could be as simple as allowing the child to sit in the front row or checking in on the child once in a while during class.

I understand that the role of a teacher is not easy. As such, I also ensure there is continuity by reinforcing what my daughter learns in school at home. So I believe it is very important that both parents and teachers work together for the overall development of the child. ■

Anonymous

Mother of a 5-year-old with learning needs

As a *Primary One teacher*, what are the common challenges a child with learning needs faces when he/she enters Primary One and how do you help the child overcome them in his/her first year?

" Transitions and change are a constant part of life. For children with learning needs, the process becomes more challenging as they deal with complex issues associated with growing up such as self-identity and relationship-building with family, friends and teachers.

Considering that Primary One students have just transited from preschool, I ensure that I create a safe and supportive classroom environment for them. Strategies and interventions are put in place to look into each child's physical, social and emotional well-being.

Getting adjusted to longer school hours is one of the first challenges that children face. One effective method for me and the children as we journey through this phase together is to constantly remind them of the time and events for the day. I also factor in regular toilet breaks as it helps them to get accustomed to the concept of seeking for permission by themselves.

I also try to keep my instructions short and simple to allow them better understanding. When working in groups, it is important to have a teacher to facilitate the discussion for a start as it helps develop the child's confidence. It is crucial to maintain a small group size for these children to allow them equal opportunities to share their opinions. A conducive learning environment helps these children to feel safe which in turn, engages them and sparks their curiosity.

Most of all, a positive teacher-student relationship can help the child feel valued thus making room for a smoother transition and in turn, developing the child into a confident learner. Of course, there are different learning needs and the relevant interventions/strategies are needed. However, the general strategies mentioned above can be put in place in the classroom to make all children feel included, regardless of their abilities. ■



Padmawathy Vellusamy
Primary One Form Teacher
Lakeside Primary School

CONNECTING THE DOTS

for Effective School Transition

In 2018, the Early Childhood and Special Needs Education Academic Group at the National Institute of Education (NIE) published a transition guidebook for local teachers and parents titled “Supporting children in their transition to Primary 1: A guide for teachers and parents in Singapore”. We speak to two of the six authors—Dr Hanin Hussain and Dr Nirmala Karuppiah who is also heading the ECSE AG and whose recent research is on parents and their views on play and holistic learning—to find out how various stakeholders can create a cohesive strategy that smooths the transition process for preschool children.

Q: What was the inspiration behind the guidebook “Supporting children in their transition to Primary 1: A guide for teachers and parents in Singapore” that was published in 2018?

Nirmala: In 2014, NIE organized its first *Henry David Hochstadt Early Childhood Symposium*. Focusing on early childhood transition, our team from the Early Childhood and Special Needs Education Academic Group (ECSE AG) invited two experts on international transition, Professors Sue Dockett and Bob Perry from Charles Sturt University, Australia, as keynote speakers. They inspired us to come up with this project so we made a trip to Australia to talk and consult with them.

Hanin: We wanted to learn from them the kinds of methodologies we could use to guide us in our project. The information they shared helped us to shape the questions for teachers, parents and children as part of the project. As the project progressed, we wanted it to be accessible, helpful and easily digestible for all stakeholders. With that in mind, the booklet was conceived.

Q: What were the major concerns of the parents, teachers and the children whom you interviewed as part of the guidebook?

Nirmala: A number of primary school teachers expressed concerns that some preschools were over-preparing the children academically. The Ministry of Education, Singapore developed the *Nurturing Early Learners* (NEL) curriculum to support preschools in ensuring that all preschoolers enter Primary One with a common set of knowledge, skills and disposition. However, there are some preschools that overteach due to pressure from the parents. The teachers think that it is more important instead for the children to be equipped with a common set of life skills like being confident, articulate and attentive.

Hanin: Some parents expressed concerns such as bullying, making new friends and the need to be independent.

Interestingly, some parents expressed issues like making new friends and independence as goals for their children instead of concerns. Parents and teachers also saw the importance of socioemotional adjustment and academic learning. However, there were still some variations within the groups on which aspect is more important than the other. I think the important thing is for preschools and primary schools to recognize that there may be some areas where parents and teachers will agree and disagree on. I see those disagreements as diversity instead of a problem. If teachers and parents can work towards common goals while valuing those diverse perspectives, they will do well to meet the different needs of teachers, parents and children.

Q: How does play-based learning help a child's holistic development during the preschool years and transition process?

Nirmala: There are different definitions, categories and theories on play. I am going to take the NEL framework definition of purposeful play where play is defined as intentional. This means that children can learn through play, and there will be certain objectives and learning outcomes to be met. It is hoped that by implementing this curriculum, children will develop in a holistic manner that will prepare them not just for the transition phase, but also for their school years and beyond.

Q: With reference to Dr Karuppiah's current research project, "Parents' Perception of 'Play' and 'Holistic Development' in the Early Years", why is it important to consider parents' views?

Nirmala: The research study helps us to ascertain and understand what parents' fears, anxieties and concerns are on play and holistic development. We need real data to explore what we can do to allay some of their concerns. With the information gathered, we can identify suitable programmes and initiatives that can help parents understand, appreciate and support the move towards holistic learning.

Q: What kind of developments do you hope to see in the area of transition?

Nirmala: A lot of effort has been put in to have conversations between different stakeholders and then attempts to join the dots together. We need to have open platforms for dialogue, conversations and continuity. We hope that more schools will come up with transition programmes to receive our children, and help them adapt and be comfortable in primary schools. It is not something that can be done overnight or in one event. It is an on-going process and I think we are moving in the right direction. ■

Hanin: I think when you think about play, there are different variations to which teachers can mobilize the different types of play. I would say that there is no one best way to teach play; each has its own value, depending on whether the teacher would like the children to experience and learn on their own or with some guidance. With that in mind, preschools should expose children to as many types and ways of play as possible.



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ONLINE EXTRAS!

What exactly is the *Nurturing Early Learners Framework* developed by the Ministry of Education? Find out more about this framework in the online version of *SingTeach!*

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