# *Step up into Education*

# *Podcast Two – Understanding the perspectives of children in the transition to school*

This podcast is designed to support professional conversations about evidence-informed approaches to transition to school and early years practices, as identified in current research and literature. This is the second in a series which will focus on supporting Queensland schools to translate research into everyday practice to:

* understand what it means to listen to children in the transition to school;
* discuss how transition teams can gather and analyse the perspectives of children during planning and the evaluation of transition programs; and
* understand how to use the interpreted data to inform next steps of the transition to school program.

**Sue Dockett** is Emeritus Professor, Charles Sturt University, Australia and Director, Peridot Education Pty Ltd. Since retiring from university life, Sue remains actively involved in research in the field of early childhood education and is an advocate for recognising and responding to the perspectives of young children. She continues to work with children, families and educators to explore transitions to school, children’s play, and learning. Sue is a co-chair of the Special Interest Group on Transitions at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association. In collaboration with Bob Perry, Sue has been researching and publishing in the transition to school field for almost 25 years.

**Tess Boyle** is an Adjunct Lecturer in the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University, Australia and Director, Tess Boyle Consulting. Recently retired after 40 years of school and university teaching and research, Tess continues to research, consult and publish in the field of early childhood; educational transitions; ethical practices involving children; practice theories; praxis; middle leading; and assessment, pedagogy and curriculum. Tess also has an impressive list of publications in high ranking peer reviewed journals and she has presented at esteemed national and international conferences.

**Announcer:**

This is a Queensland Department of Education podcast.

**Virginia Bowdidge:**

Welcome to the Queensland Department of Education podcast series about gathering, listening and analysing the perspectives of children in the transition to school. Hi, I'm Virginia Bowdidge, and in this podcast, I welcome back researcher Sue Dockett from the Peridot Education team. Sue is joined by her colleague Tess Boyle, Adjunct Lecturer in the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University, to chat about their recent work. Thanks so much for your time, Tess and Sue. It is a pleasure to chat with you today.   
  
**Sue Dockett:**

Thanks. We're happy to be here, too.

**Virginia Bowdidge:**

In the previous podcast, Listening to Children in the Transition to School, we discussed that all children have a right to be heard in all matters that affect them, including the planning and evaluation of transition programs. Children experience the transition program first hand and have insights about how it operates for them, what they consider important, what they like – or what they don’t like about the program and why.

Research shows that working with children to understand their experiences of transition to school means genuinely listening to what they have to say, and responding to that in positive ways. When educators listen to children in the transition to school, it can lead to positive outcomes including strengthening relationships between students and their teachers, support ongoing engagement and contributes to a sense of belonging to the school. It also supports the learning and development of children and promotes inclusiveness as children’s perspectives often offer different insights and raise different issues from those of adults.

In this podcast we will further explore what it means to listen to children in the transition to school; discuss different ways that transition teams can gather and analyse the perspectives of children during the planning and evaluation of transition programs; and how these teams can use children’s perspectives to inform both current and future transition to school programs.

Tess, we know that children are well positioned to share both the intended and unintended consequences of transition to school programs. So, how do adults, in particular transition teams, go about involving children in the planning and evaluation of these programs?

**Tess Boyle:**

Adults can do this by having conversations with children before they start school and, again, once they've started school. These can be audio or video recorded. Conversations might be facilitated in the first instance, by asking children to draw a picture about going to school, and then later, another about being at school. Older children can talk to transition teams about their experiences. These may include observations of Prep children starting school or reflections on their own transition experiences. It's important to remember many older children will have been involved in the transition process as buddies or as siblings of the children commencing school.

**Virginia Bowdidge:**

Sue, now that the children have participated in the data generation, what can transition teams do to effectively involve them in the analysis and interpretation of this data?

**Sue Dockett:**

I think the very, very first and perhaps most important thing is to listen. It's often challenging as adults when we're speaking with children because we think we know what they're going to say, and we think we know what it means, and we often judge to interpret what it is they're trying to say.

What we're suggesting here is it's really, really important to actively listen and hear what the children are saying. You might need to seek some clarification or some additional information from them because often their perspectives are quite different from those of adults and quite different from what we expect. What I'm really emphasising here is the importance of focusing on children's perspectives, not adult interpretations of children's perspectives. Certainly, children can be involved in the data analysis and interpretation, and one of the really, really important roles there is for adults to check with the children about what it is they're getting out of the data that children have contributed. It's really important for adults to focus on children's perspectives, not on our own adult perspectives of what children are saying or telling us.

Certainly, there are many ways in which children can be involved in data analysis and interpretation. What's really important is that adults check with the children about those interpretations that they're gaining from the data that children have contributed.

**Virginia Bowdidge:**

It sounds quite simple when you put it like that, but can it often be difficult to translate into everyday practice? Can you provide an example of what this may look like in practice?

**Tess Boyle**

Sure. Using pre and post-transition measures like the conversations and drawings previously mentioned, children can reflect on and compare the two images. Adults can prompt from responses about similarities, differences and changes. As Sue said, it's really important for children to verify the findings of this analysis undertaken by adults. This might just be a simple conversation to sound check or depth the findings. Using the drawings as an example again, then that could be as simple as saying something like, ‘in this drawing, you look excited. Is that how you felt? Do you still feel excited about coming to school?’. Don't forget older children can also assist in validating findings and claims about transition programs and experiences.

**Virginia Bowdidge:**

Thanks for providing those examples, Tess. Sue, we know it is important to communicate findings from the data clearly, accurately and ethically, in a way that facilitates conversations about all stakeholders involved in the transition to school. How can transition teams involve children in reporting these results?

**Sue Dockett:**

Again, I go back to the point that we've both made about the importance of listening to children. Like Tess has suggested, it's important to check with children about not only what it is they're trying to tell us, but how they might wish to have that reported, to whom it might be reported, as well as how and when this could occur.

Children are really capable of reporting the results. They can perhaps share images or make posters or class made books and the like. It's important to involve children in those conversations about how they would like those results to be reported. ‘How would you like us to share this information? Is there some information that you don't think you'd like to have shared? How would you like us to tell other people about what it is you've told us?’ It's important to talk with children, rather than assuming that adults are best placed to make those decisions.

However, it's also a really important role for adults to help children understand what the possible consequences of sharing information might be, and I'm particularly thinking of things like videos and images. Once you put them up on the web, they're going to be there for a long time, and sometimes I don't think either adults or children realise that once something is out there, it's going to be very difficult to retrieve it. So, conversations about what information could be reported, to whom and how can be really, really important to have with children.

**Virginia Bowdidge:**

Thanks, Sue. That's very interesting. Tess, how can transition teams work with children to plan for change in the transition to school program?

**Tess Boyle:**

Well, as Sue said, talking to children about what went well and not so well for them as they started school can provide insights into aspects of the program that might warrant change. Transition teams can look for and make space for components of the program that include children. That might be a Welcome to our School video, a recorded story titled, What you need to know about school.

**Virginia Bowdidge:**

If I can finish on this question. What challenges might a transition team need to be aware of if they genuinely aspire to involve children in all aspects of planning and evaluating a transition to school program?

**Sue Dockett:**

Well, I think there are several challenges to consider. One of the first ones and perhaps a major one is time. Involving children in conversations, in thinking about things, in following up things all takes time. It's not a one-off event, and it needs to occur within a culture of listening. Time is a fairly precious thing in school settings so time can be a real challenge.

A second challenge relates to resources and trying to work out what will be needed and how those will be used. If, for example, as Tess suggested, you're going to make a video or a photobook, then you'll need the equipment that's going to help you do that so resources can be a challenge.

It's also interesting to consider who might be involved. If we're seeking children's perspectives, one of the questions to ask ourselves is are we seeking the perspectives of all children, or do we expect some children to represent all others? Do we choose children on the basis of their level of articulateness or their behaviour? What decisions are made about choosing which children are involved and for how long and in what aspects?

It's also a challenge for many adults to listen and take children seriously. Particularly in situations of education, we're used to the adult being the one with the knowledge and the children being the learners. One of the big challenges in this situation is it involves a real transposition of those positions, where adults are genuinely seeking to listen and take children seriously. That clearly is involved in avoiding the overlay of adult interpretation.

Perhaps the final challenge is if we take all this time to listen to children and to try and understand what they're telling us, there needs to be some genuine action that occurs as a result. Otherwise, why are we all putting in all this much effort? So, a number of challenges, but I'd really like to stress that it's also a really positive and rewarding experience and can lead to genuine and productive change.  
  
**Virginia Bowdidge:**

Thank you again for your time today, Sue and Tess. It was great discussing some of the many methods and strategies available to gather, listen to, analyse and interpret the data to understand the perspectives of children and the importance of genuine action including:

* advocating for space to provide the opportunity for children to express and feel supported to share their voice
* helping to facilitate an appropriate audience where children’s views are listened to; and
* helping to influence change so that children can actively see their views acted upon.

It’s clear that there are great benefits when transition teams include children's perspectives in the planning and evaluating of transition to school programs. By seeking and responding to student feedback and actively engaging in partnerships for planning and evaluating, transition teams demonstrate that they respect and value the rights, ideas and beliefs of children. It reflects the view that children are experts in their own lives and that they have agency—the ability to influence the world around them. It has been so insightful discussing your work to learn from the research and what this may look like in practice. Thank you.

**Sue Dockett**:

Thank you very much, Virginia.

**Tess Boyle:**

Thank you, Virginia.

**Announcer:**

You have been listening to the Queensland Department of Education podcast.

The Department of Education acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands from across Queensland. We pay our respects to the elders' past and present, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

© State of Queensland (Department of Education) 2022 ([CC BY 4.0](file:///C:\Users\kmay45\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\O5R87W5I\©%20State%20of%20Queensland%20(Department%20of%20Education)%202021%20(CC%20BY%204.0)))