



Northern Territory Government

Department of Employment, Education and Training

AGE OF ENTRY TRIAL

2005

REPORT ON PHASE I

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF PHASE I

Areas Perceived as Strengths by Trial Parents

- ✓ Greater opportunities for the development of children social skills
- ✓ Good learning opportunities for children
- ✓ Preparation of children for the future formal education
- ✓ Children's enthusiasm for learning

Areas Perceived as Concerns by Trial Parents

- ✓ Level of understanding of the Age of Entry Trial
- ✓ School Resourcing
- ✓ Level of participation in school decision-making
- ✓ Communication

Areas Perceived as Strengths by Trial Educators

- ✓ Empowered to make program changes to meet the needs of individual children
- ✓ Extra support made available
- ✓ Greater opportunities to improve professional knowledge and skills
- ✓ Professional capacity to deliver quality programs

Areas Perceived as Concerns by Trial Educators

- ✓ Quality of facilities at school level
- ✓ Parent and community communication and participation in school

Identified strength highlighted at Open Forums Across the Territory

- ✓ Single intake for Transition children well received
- ✓ Opportunities for educators to reflect and improve teaching practices
- ✓ Extra funding welcomed and invaluable

Areas of Concern Highlighted at Open Forums Across the Territory

- ✓ Funding issues – resources, Part-time instructors, class sizes/ratios, facilities
- ✓ Concept of 'Quality Programs' and lack of qualified early childhood educators
- ✓ Further research into the impact on younger children
- ✓ Placement availability in Preschools

Recommendations

- ✓ Trial based on a single intake for Transition be adopted
- ✓ Flexibility for Preschool intake be maintained
- ✓ Promote staged rollout for implementation of the new policy for Preschool and Transition
- ✓ Promote adequate resourcing, quality programs and community engagement for successful implementation

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The Age of Entry Trial informs the promotion of a more clearly articulated policy for when children access publicly funded pre-compulsory programs of Preschool and Transition to maximises opportunities for children to engage in two years pre-compulsory programs or at least 12 months of Transition.

BACKGROUND

The Age of Entry Trial was conducted in nine schools in 2004 and continued in 2005 in 10 schools. The continuation of the trial from 2004 was expected to yield comprehensive evidence of the impact on school infrastructure and resources, staffing and programs.

Phase I of the trial provided:

- a single intake to Transition at the commencement of the school year for children turning 5 by 30 June.
- a single intake to Preschool at the commencement of the school year for children turning four by 30 June. Where Preschool places existed and parents wished to enrol children, Preschools, in agreement with their school community, enrolled children continuously on the understanding that children turning four in second semester spend more than 12 months in the preschool program.

BUSINESS NEED

Parents, school communities, principals and teachers have long lobbied for a clearer and more consistent policy regarding when children might access the pre-compulsory programs of Preschool and Transition.

The successful mobilisation of a new policy will require clear and targeted change management, communication, professional development and resourcing.

PROJECT OUTCOME

Phase I Trial schools become working models of key processes for successful professional learning communities. The areas of interest to build local knowledge include:

- Community engagement and empowerment
- Pedagogy and curriculum development for quality pre-compulsory programs
- Building capacity for school leadership in flexible and responsive resourcing
- Baseline data for school development and planning

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OF PHASE I (KPI)

School community capacity to provide enhanced outcomes through student-centred, quality programs

Parent / community survey (including childcare centres) indicating productive partnerships and participation

Staff survey indicating improved professional capacity to meet the needs of students and the learning community

Infrastructure and organisational structures audits indicating flexible and responsive management of resources

Assessment of Student Competencies (ASC) to identify children at risk in developmentally significant domains and provide baseline data. Indicators will be identified for schools to apply this data in mobilising appropriate interventions and articulating school community planning.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

New policy for enrolment into publicly funded pre-compulsory programs of Preschool and Transition

Professional development workshops and support document (*Strong Beginnings*)

Public communications on current findings in relation to quality early learning

PROJECT SCOPE

The project scope integrated the drafting of new policy based on the outcomes of Phase I of the trial and consultation. The evaluation process has been based on feedback loops and surveys collected from Trial schools. The inputs included:

- Delivery of on site support as designed and requested by participating school staff.
- REAL Learning professional development workshops focused on further building capacity of Preschool and Transition teachers. The workshops were based on the *Strong Beginnings: Quality pedagogy and curriculum for the pre-compulsory schooling*. Attendance of the Age of Entry Trial teachers at these workshops was a prerequisite. Curriculum Services - DEET funded these workshops.

At the beginning of 2005, the agreements were signed by all interested parties regarding the responsibilities of both schools and Curriculum Services staff, including the provision of financial resources.

METHODOLOGY

▪ **Parents and Staff Survey**

Parent and Staff surveys were used to collect quantitative data on the perceptions about the above elements of Phase I. These surveys were given to schools for completion by the end of each semester over the last two years.

▪ **School Organisational Audit**

School organisational audits were conducted to gather qualitative data. These audits were conducted during face-to-face meetings with Principals and participating staff members.

- **Open Forums**

Open forums were used to gauge the general public and stakeholders' perceptions and emerging issues.

- **Age of Entry Trial Snapshot**

Each Age of Entry Trial school is producing a snapshot to outline their background, lessons learnt from the trial and opportunities successfully taken up.

SUMMARY OF OVERALL PHASE I TRIAL ORGANISATIONAL AUDITS

Ten Northern Territory Government Schools with 32 teachers (12 Preschool and 20 Transition) participated in 2005 Age of Entry Trial. Teachers found professional learning experiences through workshops, visiting other schools and externally available courses such as 'Behaviour Management' and 'Positive Parenting Program' relevant and valuable.

The resourcing of 0.25 Part Time Instructor (PTI) for Transition programs was very well received. Many trial schools invested extra funds to this personnel resource. Some concerns were expressed about the continuation of this resource and the need to build it into staffing formula to ensure equity. -Schools with innovative full day Preschool programs are experiencing great difficulty in sustaining the level of human resourcing required. Whilst, in the short term, staff across the school has supported the extra release time and supervision, this will be overwhelming in the long term and will require a systemic solution.

The flexibility to use the grant money (\$5000) has been encouraging for schools to address specific and localised needs. Many of the trial schools have commenced major building programs and modifications to enhance the quality environments for Early Years areas.

The trial management had a positive impact on schools particularly in the area of professional learning. REAL Learning workshops were highly valued and reported to have had significant impact on educational programs offered and physical environments created.

Opportunities to identify children at risk and implement strategies to support intervention have highlighted the need for ongoing professional learning in the area of developmentally appropriate quality practices, expectations and knowledge.

Occupational Health and Safety Audits revealed minimal requirements for modification.

STUDENT ENROLMENT FIGURES FOR SCHOOLS IN PHASE I OF THE TRIAL**March 2004**

	Preschool		Transition		Total Early Entry
	Early	Total	Early	Total	
Alawa School	6	33	5	17	11
Borrooloola CEC	12	19	11	23	23
Gray School	30	70	27	45	57
Karama School	21	38	14	42	35
MacFarlane School	19	47	17	36	36
Nakara School	37	63	24	53	61
Wagaman School	11	30	7	22	18
Wanguri School	14	27	6	19	20
Top End Learning Centre	3	14	-	-	3
Sadadeen School	14	37	18	33	32
Total	167		129		296

August 2005

	Preschool		Transition		Total Early Entry
	Early	Total	Early	Total	
Alawa School	18	32	13	22	31
Borrooloola CEC	21	23	-	17	21
Gray School	33	85	18	53	51
Karama School	21	44	19	46	40
MacFarlane School	20	43	15	35	35
Nakara School	27	73	15	50	42
Wagaman School	14	33	11	34	25
Wanguri School	24	48	17	25	41
Sadadeen School	15	49	15	29	30
Tennant Creek	18	45	30	69	48
Total	211		153		364

SUMMARY OF PARENTS AND STAFF PERCEPTION SURVEY

The data from the parent and staff surveys collected over 2004 and 2005 indicate clear areas of parent and staff concerns and strengths in relation to Phase I of the Age of Entry Trial.

The common areas of greater satisfaction for items of parents are:

- provision of good learning opportunities for children
- preparing children for the future
- development of children's social skills
- children's enthusiasm for learning
- the interest taken in children by the teacher
- children's safety while at school

The common areas of concern for parents relate to:

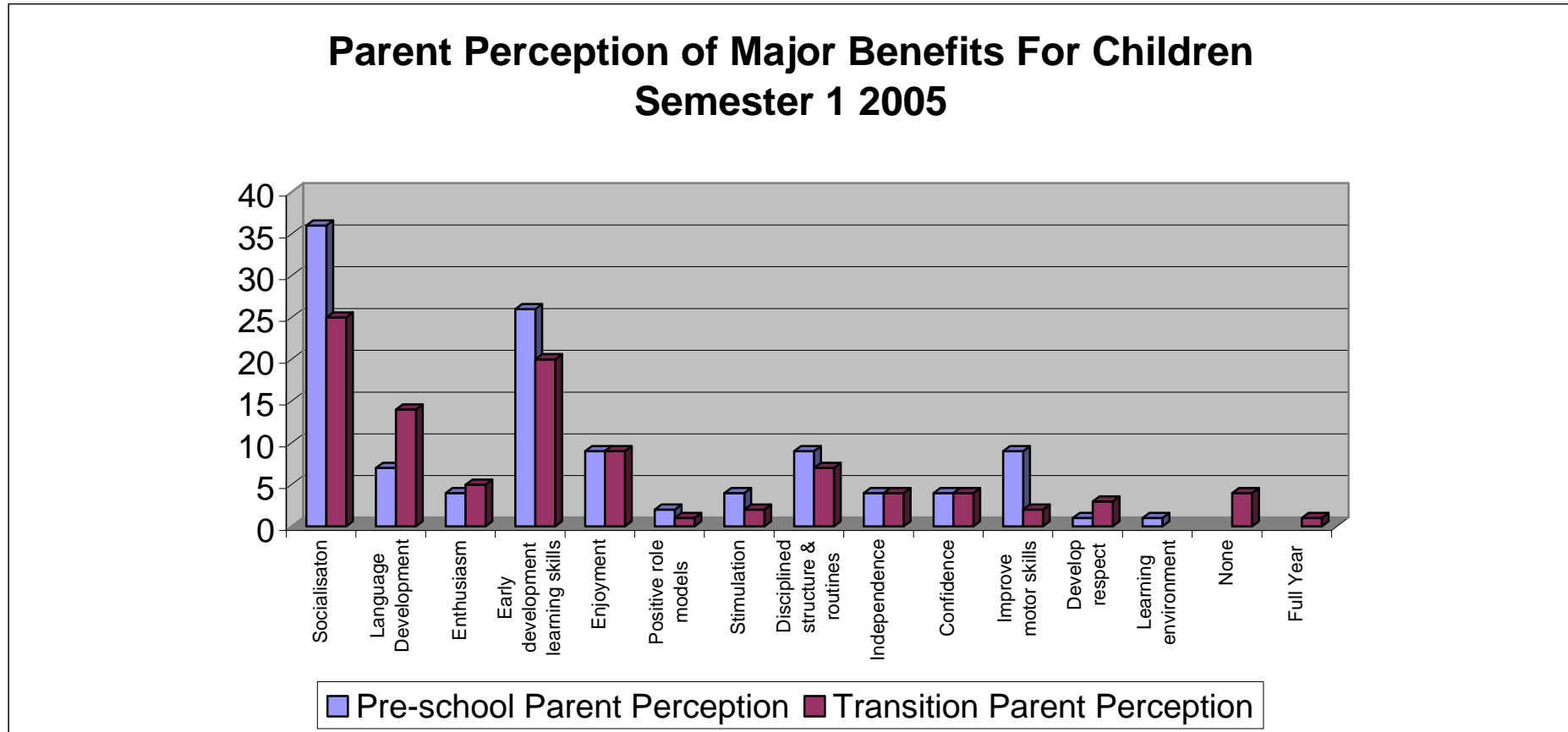
- understanding of the Age of Entry Trial
- how well the school was equipped
- the opportunities presented for parents to participate in school decision-making
- how actively staff sought and encouraged parent feedback on the trial
- the variety of communication methods used to keep parents informed of the trial

Perceived areas of strength for schools by participating staff are:

- being encouraged to take responsibility for work and program changes
- obtaining needed support within schools due to extra funds provided
- being provided with opportunities to improve skills through relevant workshops
- feeling confident in professional capacity to deliver quality programs

Common areas of concern for staff include:

- quality of facilities available at school level for children
- how parents / community communicate and participate in school programs and activities



The difference in how many parents perceive these benefits relates to the fact that more Preschool parents responded to the survey than Transition parents.

Transition and Preschool parents of Phase I of the Age of Entry Trial schools perceive following benefits for children having access to pre-compulsory education earlier:

- ✓ Children begin to develop important social and learning skills earlier
- ✓ Improved language development. These include speech and oral language development as well as the development of reading and writing skills.

NOTE: Transition parents who responded with no benefit to their child were parents whose children were not early entry, so they did not see the trial as a beneficial.