

Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY)

Research Snapshot

Snapshot four

Responsiveness to individual children

The LSEY communities have been utilising a partnership approach to support responsiveness to children's individual learning needs and styles, and their individual strengths and interests. Children's long-term success in school derives from their learning experiences before school, as well as the learning environment in the early school years (CCCH, 2008). If schools fail to build on what children have learned prior to school entry, the benefits of positive early learning experiences may fade out in time (CCCH, 2008).

Cumulative learning for children

The LSEY project community partnerships used family and service consultation information, local data and baseline LSEY evaluation information to identify focus areas and actions that could provide a continuum of learning for children from home, early years services and into schools. The data showed that there was:

- minimal communication between early years services, schools and community services
- minimal information sharing between early years services, schools and community services
- the use of very different methods and environments to deliver early years service and prep learning programs
- an inability to access necessary community services reported by some parents
- a rapidly changing state and federal policy context regarding cross-sectoral partnerships, aligned curriculum, joint planning, and family engagement.

Each LSEY community has worked together to demonstrate that greater connections, effective communication and collaborative planning can provide greater responsiveness to children's learning and development. This partnership approach recognises that building on children's earlier learning experiences and being responsive to children's individual needs requires cross-sectoral collaboration.

Practice change in LSEY communities

Information sharing about children's learning (with consent) and about teaching approaches and programs is now part of common practice for most early years services and schools.

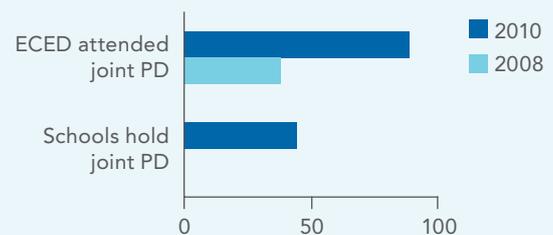
Seamless learning environments between many early years service and school learning environments have led to remodelled curriculums and redesigned physical learning spaces.

Cross-sector partnerships have developed to plan and deliver education programs (early years and prep); and to deliver joint professional development for early years services, schools, community services and education governing bodies.

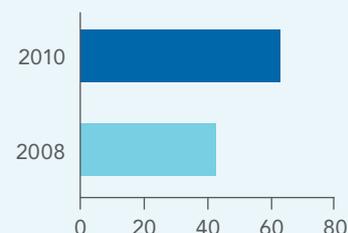
What has LSEY found?

The LSEY external evaluation has found positive changes in the way that early years services, schools and community services work together to respond to the individual learning needs of children. The findings below show change over time between 2008 and 2010 (SPRC, 2008 & 2010):

Increased joint professional development (PD) between early years services and schools (%).



Increased information sharing between early years services and schools (%).



Increased referrals between early years services, schools and community services:



25% increase in early years service referrals to community services.

24% increase in schools' referrals to community services.

33% increase in community service referrals to early years services.

"There is no talk about whether they're [children] ready or not, it's about how schools can cater for individual needs and I think that's been a quantum shift"

— Policy/practice stakeholder

Contributing activities

A range of activities has contributed to enhancing the capacity of early years services and schools to respond to the strengths and individual learning needs of all children.

Peer planning: Early years services and schools have collaboratively developed and delivered inquiry-based educational programs for children in early years services and schools. Local educators also draw on the expertise of child and family services to plan diverse and responsive learning experiences.

Consistent learning environments: Some schools have worked to re-develop their prep program from a traditionally formal learning environment to an inquiry-based curriculum and/or more flexible physical learning environments that are more consistent with those in early years services. Schools that have made this change have reportedly enabled greater capacity to engage families and offer more diverse learning opportunities and responsive approaches.

Sharing professional knowledge and learning: Professional networks and forums bring the early years profession together for planning and professional learning, supporting the capacity for and value of information sharing and collaborative planning approaches.

Early years and prep educators worked with local specialist support services to develop a model for building educator capacity to respond to children who may require additional support to make a positive transition to school and engage in learning opportunities. Through professional development and mentoring, this new way of working has also engaged private, state and Catholic school specialist support services to work together to align professional development themes and dates.

Creating mechanisms for sharing: Strong relationships between early years services, schools and community services have enabled joint development of meaningful information-sharing tools and processes. These have included common language tools and peer support for implementing Victorian government Transition Learning and Development Statements as well as a shared understanding of children's developmental strengths and needs.

"LSEY has enabled us to take a step back and say: 'This is the need in our town. What are we going to do? How are we going to respond in order to meet that need.' It's not about the children changing to fit us. It's about us changing to fit the needs of children and families"

— School Principal

Implications:

Policy, research and communities

- Schools, early years services and community services have the capacity to embrace the concept of schools being ready for children as opposed to children being ready for school.
- Innovative approaches to cross-sector (peer) planning for individual children are possible and are necessary to enable greater responsiveness to children's individual learning needs and strengths.
- Developing prep programs that have greater alignment with early years services is possible within current primary school curriculum frameworks.
- Private, state and Catholic school support services and systems can work together to pool resources and streamline support that is informed by local educators and children's learning experiences.
- A wealth of information exists within families, early childhood development and education services, schools and community services that should be shared to ensure children experience a continuum of learning and support.
- Local early years (0–8) service systems have the capacity to provide a continuum of learning and support for children by rethinking how they plan for meeting the needs of individual children and build on (not duplicate) their earlier learning experiences.
- The capacity for collaborative practice sharing, peer planning and a continuum of learning and support for children and their families' needs to be underpinned by strong relationships between all key stakeholders. These relationships can develop when professionals are afforded time within their existing roles to network and think at a community-wide level.

About LSEY snapshots

The LSEY snapshot series aims to share findings from LSEY's approach and activities. Findings are based on the experiences of three Victorian communities: Corio–Norlane in the City of Greater Geelong, Footscray in the City of Maribyrnong and Hastings in the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

The LSEY pilot has a cross-sectional external evaluation being conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. Data was collected in 2008, 2010 and 2012. These research snapshots explore the 2008–2010 data.

This time-limited series of snapshots will run from 2012 into early 2013 to communicate evaluation findings and highlight examples of good practice from six years of community implementation.

The series will explore:

- The LSEY approach
- Supporting smooth transitions
- Engaging families
- Responsive schools
- Sustainability
- The final findings

For more information about the LSEY project see:

www.rch.org.au/lsey

References

Centre for Community Child Health. (2006). *Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years services*. The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

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