

reflections

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BUILDING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY OF HOW AN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEAM AND PRIMARY SCHOOL STAFF COLLABORATE AROUND TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

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The Broadmeadows Valley Children's Program, an education and care centre, is co located with the Broadmeadows Valley Primary School. This creates a significant opportunity to establish a strong partnership for the benefit of educators, children and families.

"We believe that the best way to learn is to do it with somebody else. This gives our students and teachers the opportunity to talk to others about what they are learning and to share their knowledge and learn from each other" (Carmela Bianco, Principal, Broadmeadows Valley Primary School)



This article presents the perspective of two educators; the leader of a Foundation (Prep) to Grade 2 group at Broadmeadows Valley Primary School (BVPS) and a kindergarten teacher working in Broadmeadows Valley Children's Kindergarten Program, an education and care centre, that is co-located with the BVPS. This co-location creates a significant opportunity to establish a strong partnership for the benefit of educators, children and families.

In 2016, Gowrie Victoria commenced operations of the Broadmeadows Valley children's program. The unique design of the centre provides opportunities for community building through a shared outdoor space, dining space and close connections with BVPS and the wider community.

Key staff in both settings are working together to achieve a professional partnership across the early childhood and school environments to provide an effective transition from their early childhood experiences to formal school.

The story starts with the perspective of Amy Prisco, leader of Foundations to Grade 2 at BVPS sharing her insights on the benefits of developing a collaborative approach between educators at the school and the early childhood program.

The school-based perspective: Amy

There is a big focus on collaboration for all staff at BVPS. There is an expectation that teachers and support staff work together to support children to succeed. The school structure is multi age and we use the Helen Timperley Inquiry Model as a process to explore how to meet

children learning needs and the related learning needs of teachers. Our attention is consistently focused on the collection and analysis of evidence of learning for all our children. We unpack the data collaboratively and tease out the factors that contribute to and/or inhibit children's learning. This sense of shared accountability enriches the planning process.

Our school is culturally and linguistically diverse and, as is the case in so many schools we put a great deal of effort into making a difference in the lives of the children and look for ways of tracking the impact of what we do. We have high expectations for each child with the slogan, 'A year for a year', which means we aim for at least a year of growth for each child regardless of their background and current life experience. We acknowledge that the backgrounds of children can have a profound influence on their learning and so many of our children have experienced many challenges in terms of preparing them for their lifelong learning. Children's wellbeing is where we start. Attending to the wellbeing needs remains a continuing thread throughout the school life for our children. It underpins the learning and is worth the investment, especially in those vital early years. Therefore the connection between the school and the early childhood centre becomes so vital.

We have developed a shared vision and values and this process has made it possible for us to consistently make the time to meet, collaborate, share and grow knowledge. Although we are at the early stages of the partnership, we are enjoying observing the gains that are flowing from that commitment to professional collaboration. Sharing information between key staff about individual children's

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learning needs and social and emotional development forms part of the ongoing exchange of information between kindergarten teachers and early years primary teachers. It has far greater benefits than the traditional transition documentation sent on to primary teachers at the end of the year before the child starts school.

The early childhood perspective: Stephanie

Stephanie Tomlin, one of the kindergarten teachers at Broadmeadows Valley Children's Program identifies a range of strategies that support the professional collaboration and provide strong connections between the kindergarten programs and school.

The scope and sequence for programs in both the children's program and school context are developed through scheduled collaborative planning sessions and shared with educators in both sites which includes discussions about how learning experiences are organised. An overview of the term by term planner is also shared across both sites. There are shared learning opportunities for all students across both the school and early childhood settings and there are play-based rooms on the school site that reflect the learning environment in the kindergarten. These contexts are enriched by visits to each other's classroom spaces. The children from Learning Neighbourhood 1 (Foundation to Grade 2) visit the kindergarten learning spaces, in small groups for various activities including literacy and art projects. To provide the kindergarten children and their families connected to the school, the children regularly join with the school children to perform items at the school assemblies.

"... We can learn from each other as professionals so that we best capture each child's learning progress. We are separate organisations with different structures but it feels like we are connected. I do love it when we get to go over and participate in events. It's so good to feel part of the whole school community."

We work intentionally on environment familiarisation for children and families by using a range of strategies:

- Buddy reading fortnightly.
- Shared/complimentary enrichment activities including literacy and numeracy learning experiences.
- Communications through each other's newsletters (School and Children's Program).
- Drops offs at school for the kindergarten children and then the students walk with educators across to the kindergarten.
- Shared professional learning to strengthen consistent pedagogy across contexts.
- Shared knowledge about the students (kindergarten to school) and regular opportunities to discuss learning needs and progress of students.
- Performances at festivals.

Benefits of the collaborative partnership:

- Supporting children's readiness for school.
- Stronger relationships between professionals, children and families.
- Children are more familiar with routines for learning.
- Children are more relaxed in the school environment.
- Teachers are familiar to the children before they transition to school.
- We sustain ongoing relationships with the families.

Recommendations for effective transitions

- Establish a commitment to working together across the sectors of early childhood and school.
- Identify ways to share information, ideas and activities on a regular basis that are relevant to your local community.
- Collaborate in the development of a Term Planner that includes activities and learning experiences for both children in the kindergarten and school learning environments.
- Participate in community events together.

This article has focused mainly on the partnership between the kindergarten programs and the school at Broadmeadows Valley. However, in 2017 the partnership approach to preparing children for lifelong formal and informal learning has shifted focus to include infant and toddlers building connections with the school community also. We look forward to sharing more of our journey in future publications.

For your professional learning and support contact your state based Gowrie listed below:

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