

SUBMISSION TO
THE PARLIAMENT OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

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This submission will address the terms of references related to the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, in relation to their social skills and behaviour in the early years of schooling, particularly the first year of schooling. Research finding will be presented and some implications for practice will be suggested.

Introduction

The transition to the first year of schooling has been perceived as one of the major challenges children have to face in their early childhood years. This transition can be a critical factor for children's adjustment to the demands of the school environment and in determining future school success. When children experience social and behavioural problems in the early years of school, they are more likely to continue experiencing these problems throughout their schooling (Ladd & Price, 1987; Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994).

The absence of, or difficulty with, social or cognitive skills, and the presence of problem behaviours, generally impacts on the child's adjustment to school and is seen to indicate maladjustment (Thompson, 1975; Gresham & Elliott, 1987; Ladd & Price, 1987). It is worth noting that the presence of academic problems places children at higher risk of developing social behaviour deficits (Merrell, 1989; Ladd, 1990). The study by Love Logue, Trudeau & Thayer, (1992) commissioned by the US Department of Education to investigate transition activities provided by schools to enhance the continuity of experiences between preschool situations and school, found that ten percent of children had academic adjustment difficulties.

A study by Slee (1986, p. 107), of children's adjustment to preschool found that after four weeks, 13.3% of children had some difficulty adjusting based on teacher's perceptions, and at the end of the year 33% of those children were still perceived as having difficulty. The descriptive study of children's difficulties on commencing school, by Hughes, Pinkerton and Plewis (1979) suggested, on the basis of a teacher rating scale, that thirteen percent of children experienced difficulty adjusting to the first year of school, with boys having significantly more difficulty than girls. One quarter of these children having difficulty adjusting to school were still having difficulty later on. However, as this represented only two out of eight children

followed up from the initial thirty-four found to have difficulty adjusting to school, further research is required to substantiate this.

Gender is one of a number of factors associated with children's adjustment to the first year of schooling. Gender has been associated with adjustment to school with boys generally having significantly more difficulty adjusting to school than girls (Hughes et al., 1979; Renwick, 1984). Renwick (1984) found three times as many boys as girls had 'speech which can be understood only with some difficulty'; with fifty-nine percent of boys could print their name compared with eighty-two percent of girls, and twenty-five percent of boys could do up their shoes compared with eighty-five percent of girls. Boys were rated higher than girls for general maladjustment and aggressiveness, and for the presence of learning problems (Benyamini, 1986), and externalising behaviours such as hyperactivity (Weissberg & Cowan, 1987, Margetts, 1996) and hostility-hyperactivity (Kinard & Reinherz, 1986). Boys were rated lower than girls for sociometric measures (Teltsch & Breznitz, 1988; Margetts (1996), academic performance (Weissberg & Cowan, 1987); communication competence and attention (Skarpness & Carson, 1987).

Given the pervasiveness of school adjustment problems in having lasting or cumulative effects and the potential costs to the individual and to society there is a need to study early school adjustment and to identify predictors of children's adjustment to the first year of school (Ladd, 1990).

Adjustment to School

An expression of children's adjustment is the degree to which they feel comfortable and involved in the new environment (Ladd & Price, 1987). Adjustment partly depends on the child possessing the necessary skills to respond to the demands of the new environment and to work independently (Role, Fiechtl & Innocenti, 1982). Adjustment also includes responses to academic demands, behavioural expectations, length of school day, interaction with others, acceptance of rules, and class size (Love et al., 1992).

There is strong support for adjustment to be measured in terms of social and behavioural adjustments in a variety of domains and including academic competence. (Thompson, 1975; Hughes et al., 1979; Slee, 1986; Rydell, 1989; Love et al., 1992; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992). Research suggests that successful transitions from one educational setting to another require two kinds of skills: conventional academic skills, and practical 'survival' skills or adaptive behaviours, as children face the academic, physical, and social and emotional challenges of commencing school (Hughes et al., 1979; Ladd & Price, 1987; Rice & O'Brien, 1990; Barth & Parke, 1993). These skills include the ability to work independently and to respond to behavioural expectations, length of school day, interaction with others, acceptance of rules, and class size (Love et al.; 1992). Adjustment requires children to meet social/cultural standards of personal independence and social responsibility and to behave in ways that are acceptable to the classroom teacher (Renwick, 1984; Gresham & Elliott, 1987). This can vary from school to school and classroom to classroom. Children are at risk of not adjusting easily to school when there is a mismatch between the skills, attitudes and knowledge the children brings to school and the expectations of the school itself (Fowler, 1982; Lombardi, 1992; Renwick, 1984).

Social and behavioural challenges for children commencing school

Starting school involves coping with change and with the uncertainties and tensions which accompany it, and responding appropriately to those demands. Children must adjust to strange buildings and classrooms, new school and teacher expectations, new academic challenges, and they need to mix with a new and more diverse group of children. (Cleave Jowett & Bate., 1982; Skarpness & Carson, 1987). Children from rural areas often have to travel by school bus, and spend long hours away from home.

Class sizes and the ratio of staff to children changes at school. There is now only one adult per class. There is more verbal instruction, a focus on literacy and numeracy, and the need to use pencils and other small equipment. There is an increase in waiting times, and the daily schedule is more structured, with more formal rules and routines (Cleave et al., 1982; Renwick, 1987; Fowler, 1982).

As children move to specialist classrooms each with a different teacher they need to adjust to the different attitudes and expectations of each teacher. They are faced with large groups of children of different ages and size especially during assembly and playtime, and they are confronted with the challenges of making new friends (Ladd & Price, 1987; Ladd, 1990).

Toilets are often located away from classrooms and play areas. There are more buildings and the playgrounds are bigger. There is often only limited adult supervision in the playgrounds. Physical activities are generally restricted to physical education lessons and playtime involving a lot of running, climbing and ball games. More details about these challenges are provided in the following paper Margetts (1999).

As children commence school they are required to function independently, develop relationships with staff and peers, and to behave in ways that are appropriate for their class and school and involve conforming to rules. Adjustment is therefore a combination of social skills, behavioural responses and academic competence (Thompson, 1975; Hughes et al., 1979; Slee, 1986; Rydell, 1989; Love et al., 1992; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992).

In helping children make the transition to school it is therefore important to identify the social skills, behaviours and academic competencies that contribute to children's adjustment and to put in place strategies to promote these abilities.

To identify factors that impact on children's adjustment the first year of school, this author has conducted a number of studies.

A study (Margetts, 2000), not reported here, identifies the items that predict adjustment in subdomains related to social skills, problem behaviours and academic competence, for children attending four primary schools across Melbourne. The identification of predictors of adjustment can assist professionals in preschool and the early years of schooling in determining the skills and attitudes that may assist children with the transition into the first year of schooling. Knowledge of these particular skills

and abilities can also provide a focus for observations and planning for individuals and groups of children in early childhood programs and also in assessing the likelihood of children having difficulty adjusting to school. This study used SEM techniques for exploring and explaining direct, indirect and interdependent effects of observable variables and contributes to an understanding of the latent variables of adjustment and the items that provide valid predictors for the current sample. Redundant SSRS items have been removed and other items have been covaried on substantive grounds. This study is available online (Margetts, 2000).

Study 1

A study conducted in 1995 proposed that if transition programs are implemented to assist children's adjustment to the initial demands of commencing school, the success of these programs can be better assessed by a quantitative measure of children's adjustment to school. It was anticipated that children attending schools that conducted a high number of transition activities adjusted better to school initially, than children attending schools that conducted a more limited number of transition activities. Results indicate statistically significant associations between children's adjustment to the first year of school, personal and background factors, transition activities conducted by schools, children's preschool and early school experiences, experiences, the absence or presence of a friend, and a number of other factors.

Subjects, Sample Selection and Timeline

Subjects were 197 children in their first year of school at four Victorian, government elementary schools. Children with disabilities and those speaking English as a second language were included in the study. Children who were repeating the first year of school were excluded from the study. The four schools comprised two schools conducting low numbers of transition activities (five and seven respectively) and two schools conducting high numbers of transition activities (fourteen and seventeen respectively). These schools were selected from 100 schools involved in a random telephone survey to determine transition activities conducted by Melbourne metropolitan government elementary schools (Margetts, 1996). The schools were matched as closely as possible on the basis of total number of activities; the number of activities for parents, children, family, and staff, before and after the commencement of school; number of children in the class; female teaching staff; straight class structure; estimated socio-economic status of the majority of school families. Eight teachers participated in the study and 79.8% of parents responded to the invitation to participate.

A timeline was established to control for the effect of the environment on children's adjustment to school and data was collected during the ninth week of schooling. This timing for measuring early school adjustment is supported by other researchers (Ladd & Price, 1987; Ladd, 1990; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992).

Procedures, instrumentation and measures

Adjustment of Children to School: The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) was employed to measure children's adjustment to the first year of school. This instrument was chosen because it includes norm-referenced

behaviour rating scales for completion by teachers and parents, which may be used to provide a broad picture of children's adjustment to school and convergent validity of measure. The SSRS includes the domains of social skills, behavioural responses and academic competence as responses to the home and school situations, and these domains reflect the criteria identified in the literature (Hughes et al., 1979; Itskowitz et al., 1987; Ladd & Price, 1987; Howes, 1990; Rice & O'Brien, 1990).

Teacher Ratings after Eight Weeks of School: The SSRS Teacher Form consists of 57 items which provide data of children's social skills, behaviour, and academic competence. The social skills domain includes the subscales of co-operation, assertion and self control. The problem behaviour domain includes the sub-scales of externalising behaviours, internalising behaviours and hyperactivity. Academic competence is one small domain.

Parent Ratings after Eight Weeks of School: The SSRS Parent Form consists of 55 items which provide data on children's social skills and behaviour. The social skills domain contains the subscales of cooperation, assertion, responsibility and self control. The problem behaviour domain contains the subscales of externalising behaviours, internalising behaviours and hyperactivity.

Background Information on Children: Questionnaires were constructed to obtain information from teachers and parents which could impact on the data obtained from the SSRS. These questionnaires were stapled to the front of the SSRS forms. Teachers were asked to supply the child's name, date of birth, gender, if disabled, and if repeating the first year of school. Teachers were also asked to rate the child's adjustment to school on a 3-point scale.

Parents were asked to supply information concerning the child's age and gender, number of children in the family, languages spoken at home, parent's employment, family structure, attendance at preschool and other situations, adjustment in previous situations, parental happiness with the orientation program, and asked to rate their child's adjustment to school.

Data analysis

Data from the teacher and parent questionnaires were carefully coded and entered into the computer along with standard scores from the SSRS Forms.

Adjustment Scores: SSRS Scores are based on frequency ratings reflecting a specific behaviour, and they provide non-interval, ordinal data. To obtain interval data and percentile ranks, total Scale raw scores were converted to Behaviour Levels and standard scores using tables provided in the SSRS manual.

Establishing reliable measures of adjustment to school: In order to establish the most reliable measures of children's adjustment to school it was necessary to first analyse the data to determine the degree of consistency between aspects of the teacher and parent rating scales. A series of correlational analyses were conducted to determine which data from teacher and parent ratings provided the greater concurrency. A number of valid aggregate adjustment scores were established from the domains of

social skills, the absence of problem behaviours, and academic competence as rated by teachers, and for the absence of problem behaviours as rated by parents.

Exploring the relationship between independent variables and children's adjustment to school: To determine if significant associations existed between independent variables and measures of children's adjustment to school a series of Pearson correlational analyses was conducted and means tables were inspected. Means tables and univariate (ANOVA) analyses of variance were used to determine which of these predictor variables best accounted for most of the variance in composite measures of adjustment to school (TBEH, TADJUST, TBES, BEH), and to determine the significance or otherwise of the results.

Results of Study 1

The results of exploratory correlation analyses are presented in Table 1. Means tables were inspected to indicate the direction of relationships and results are discussed below. Gender was not significantly correlated with the composite measures of adjustment (TBEH, TADJUST, TBES, BEH), and these results are not reported here. Gender was therefore not included in further analyses. More comprehensive results of this study are described in Margetts (1996).

Table 1 Correlations between Measures of Adjustment and Independent Variables

VARIABLES	Measures of Adjustment						
	TC	TA	TS	TE	TI	TH	TAC
Activity	-.09	.05	-.21**	-.13	-.24**	-.14*	.07
Hours	-.11	-.02	-.20**	.28**	.07	.12	-.20*
Mate	.16*	.15	.24**	-.22**	-.25**	-.19*	.17*
Cencare	-.06	-.03	-.18*	.25**	.06	.09	-.05
Kindon	.09	-.01	.10	-.22**	.04	-.09	.15
Lang	-.12	-.10	-.08	na	na	na	-.16*
Gender	.24**	.15*	.17*	-.21**	-.08	-.22**	-.08
Age	-.07	-.04	.03	-.03	.05	-.07	.20**
			* $p < .05$	** $p < .01$		*** $p < .001$	

Measures of Adjustment -

TC - teacher rated cooperation; TA- teacher rated assertion; TS – teacher rated social skills

TE – teacher rated externalising behaviour; TI – teacher rated internalising behaviour; TH – teacher rated hyperactivity

TAC – teacher rated academic competence

Variables -

Activity - high numbers of transition activities

Hours - more than twelve hours of weekly attendance at preschool and child care situations in the year before commencing school

Mate - presence of a familiar playmate in the same class

Cencare - attendance at child care

Kindon - attendance at preschool only

Lang - English not spoken at home

Gender – male/ female

The results of the study support the hypothesis that children who attended schools that conducted a high number of transition activities adjusted better to school than children who attended schools that conduct a more limited number of transition activities. It can be implied that transition programs with multiple opportunities for children and parents to familiarise themselves with the school environment and expectations have a positive association with children's adjustment to school and lower ratings of problem behaviour.

Results also suggest that a number of other factors influence children's adjustment to the first year of school. These factors need to be considered when planning for effective transition.

Gender: Boys were rated as having more difficulty adjusting to school, in terms of social skills and behaviour, than girls. Boys had lower scores for cooperation, $r = .24$, $p < .01$, assertion, $r = .15$, $p < .05$, and self-control, $r = .17$, $p < .05$. Boys also had higher scores than girls for hyperactivity, $r = .21$, $p < .01$, and externalising problems, $r = .22$, $p < .01$. Whilst not significant, the direction of the relationship with academic competence suggested boys were rated with lower scores than girls.

Relative age: Correlations between relative age and adjustment to school reveal that older children were rated as more academically competent than younger children $r = .20$, $p < .01$. This supports the findings of Savage (1975) and Teltch & Breznitz (1988) and implies that relative age is associated with adjustment to school as a measure of academic competence.

Children's home language: The results of the study suggest that speaking English at home influences children's adjustment to school. Children who did not speak English at home were rated as having fewer social skills, more problem behaviour and being less academically competent than children who spoke English at home, $r = -.16$, $p < .05$.

Attendance at preschool services: Children who attended preschool services for more than twelve hours per week, $r = -.22$, $p < .01$, or attended centre-based child care, $r = -.19$, $p < .05$ were rated as having more problem behaviour. Children who attended sessional preschool but not child care had lower scores for problem behaviour, $r = .21$, $p < .01$. The association of attendance at centre-based child care with children's adjustment to school in terms of problem behaviour cannot be ignored. Taken together with the data of 'The School Transition Activities Project' (Margetts, 1996) indicating that whilst eighty-six percent of schools contacted kindergartens only two percent of schools contacted child care centres about children's transition to school, it can be inferred that the development of links between child care and school situations is urgently needed. It is imperative that strategies are implemented to develop effective links between child care centres and schools for including children who attend centre-based child care services, and their parents, in effective transition processes.

The presence of a familiar playmate in the same class: The presence of a familiar playmate in the same class was a highly significant factor associated with children's adjustment to school. Children who commenced school with a familiar playmate in the same class were rated as having more social skills, less problem behaviour and greater academic competence than children who commenced school without a familiar playmate in the same class, $r = .23$, $p < .01$. It should also be noted that having

a familiar playmate in the same class may also compensate for deleterious factors, such as attendance of more than twelve hours at preschool-type situations, speaking a language other than English at home, being a boy, and being young, which place a child at risk in terms of not adjusting well to the first year of school. Thus strategies should be developed for promoting the continuation of existing friendships, or the development of new friendships prior to children commencing school. Pairing children with friends in the same class should be a priority in helping children adjust to the demands of school (Margetts, 1997).

Study 2

Non-parental child care is very much a part of our society. Considerable discussion continues as to the benefits or otherwise to children receiving non-parental childcare and in particular, long day centre-based care. There is some evidence to suggest that attendance at long day care and children's adjustment to school is negatively related. Factors associated with parental and non-parental care of children and their impact on children's development require further study, especially in the Australian context.

This study is in process and has been designed to identify factors predicting children's adjustment to school including family background, prior-to-school contexts, arrangements for the parental and non-parental care of children, and school transition experiences.

In studying the impact of types of child care and the timing and extensiveness of care on children's development an ecological framework has been adopted because child care, home environment, family-related experiences and child characteristics are interdependent. Each contributes to children's development in terms of socio-emotional, cognitive, language and health domains. (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994).

Subjects, sample and timeline

Subjects were 213 children in twelve (12) preparatory classes across four (4) Melbourne state-run primary schools. Each of the twelve (12) classroom teachers participated in the study. Schools were selected on the basis of attendance by significant numbers of children involved in a larger study looking at links between adjustment to school and adjustment to preschool. Children with disabilities or who spoke English as a second language were included in the study. All classes were straight preparatory classes and did not include composite or multi-age classes. All teachers were female.

Procedures, instrumentation and measures

Procedures, instrumentation and measures were the same as those used in Study 1 reported in this submission. Data were obtained using the 57-Item Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Teacher Form) (Elementary Level). The social skills domain (Items 1-30) includes the sub-domains of co-operation, assertion and self-control. The problem behaviours domain (Items 31-48), includes the subscales of externalizing behaviour, internalizing behaviour and hyperactivity. Academic competence is one small domain (items 49-57). Teachers were aware of the domain categories but they were unaware of the sub-domain categories.

Rating scales were completed by teachers within nine weeks of children commencing the first year of school.

Relationships between types of child care and measures of adjustment.

To determine the degree of concurrent relationship between types of child care, personal and demographic measures, school measures, and measures of children's adjustment, Spearman's rho were performed to establish correlation coefficients. Types of child care included centre based child care (CCC), family day care (FDC), occasional care (OC), care by neighbours, friends or others (NFOT), grandparent care (GP), care by a nanny (NAN), three year old preschool (TYO), four year old preschool (FYO), care by fathers (FCA), and care by mothers (MCA). Personal and demographic factors included age, gender, language spoken at home, parents' occupation levels, relative income and a range of other factors. School factors were related to transition experiences. Measures of adjustment to the first year of schooling as rated by teachers included co-operation (tsc), assertion (tsa), self-control (tss), summed cooperation, assertion and self-control (tscas), externalising behaviour (tse), internalising behaviour (tsi), hyperactivity (tsh), combined externalising, internalising and hyperactivity (tseih) and academic competence (tsac). It is worth noting that indices of age were not significantly correlated with any measures of adjustment.

Table 2 Correlations between personal and demographic variables and children's adjustment to school

Adjustment	Personal and demographic factors						School factors				
	GENDER	MOCC	FOCC	FPAY	HCC	SLANG	FRIEND	TRANS	BSC	ASC	OSHC
	n=217	n=161	n=158	n=158	n=154	n=160	n=162	n=162	n=159	n=159	n=159
TSC	.27***	.07	.16*	-.14	-.10	.18*	.10	.12	-.13	-.04	-.04
TSA	.13*	.22**	.26***	-.31***	-.25**	.16*	-.06	.14	.09	.06	-.06
TSS	.22***	.14	.27***	-.14	-.12	.07	.15	.20**	-.13	.00	-.02
TSCAS	.25***	.18*	.29***	-.25***	-.20*	.16*	.14	.19*	-.06	-.02	.01
TSE	-.25***	-.03	-.24**	.07	.03	-.04	.17*	-.11	.21**	-.03	-.01
TSI	-.08	-.19*	-.18*	.30***	.18*	-.08	-.10	-.05	-.09	-.23**	-.21**
TSH	-.33***	-.03	-.23**	.08	.11	-.14	-.14	-.13	-.16	.00	-.01
TSEIH	-.30***	-.09	-.27***	.18*	.13	-.11	-.16*	-.13	.11	-.08	-.07
TSAC	.17*	.15	.13	-.15*	-.08	.22**	.17*	.19*	.02	.02	.01

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

GENDER	male/female
MOCC	mother occupation - no, part time, full time
FOCC	father occupation, no, part time, full time
FPAY	family payment
HCC	health care card
FRIEND	friend in class
TRANS	rated number of transition activities for child and family
SLANG	home language – other, other and English, English
BSC	before school care
ASC	after school care
OSHC	outside school hours care – either BSC or ASC

Variance in measures of adjustment associated with types of child care, personal and demographic factors, and school factors

To determine significant or trend predictors of measures of adjustment, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with linear control for variables that might mediate or confound the effect of types of child care. Variables were selected for early entry in the regression analyses based on correlations with the dependent or outcome variables, as presented in Table 1. This order varies slightly for measures of adjustment in relation to problem behaviour and is discussed in the relevant sections. For the most part, gender was entered first which accounted for six percent of the variance in measures of adjustment. Language spoken at home was entered next. At the third step the demographic variables of father employment and family payment were entered. School related variables were entered at the fourth step. Child care type was entered separately at the next step.

In reading stepwise multiple regression tables, the readers' attention is drawn to important features. The partial regression coefficients express the increase in the dependent variable that would be produced by a one unit increase in the independent variable if the effect all other independent variables or predictors, both on themselves and the dependent variable, were held constant. The strength of the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables is indicated by the squared multiple correlation coefficient, R^2 , and indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is associated with the predictor variables when they are considered simultaneously with those entered in previous steps. The β (beta weight) at the final step expresses the change in standard deviations in the dependent variable produced by an increase of one standard deviation in the particular independent variable when all independent variables have been entered. Thus the regression coefficients indicate the individual effects at each step whilst the beta weight indicates the individual contribution of independent or predictor variables to the dependent variable in the final equation.

Results of Study 2

The results of regression analyses revealed that gender, language spoken at home, father employment, family payment, before school care, having a best friend in the same class, transition experiences and different indexes of centre-based child care accounted for between twelve percent and twenty two percent of the variance in measures of adjustment to the first year of schooling when considered simultaneously. These results are not reported here.

The preliminary results of regression analyses also revealed significant and nonsignificant associations between different indexes of types of child care and measures of adjustment to the first year of schooling after linear control for variables that might mediate the effect of indexes of child care. Again these results are not reported here as this present submission is related to gender issues.

Table 3 does however represent the results for gender when it was entered at the first and final steps in relation to the effects of attendance at centre-based child care. It should be noted that the results in relation to the effects of other types of child care are very similar in relation to the contribution of gender, and in some cases stronger.

Table 3

Gender contributions to hierarchical regressions controlling for personal, demographic, school factors, and attendance at centre-based child care

adjustment measure	df	R	R ²	ΔR ²	R ² change	F change	β at final step
TSC	1,152	.30	.09	.09	.09	15.47****	.28****
TSA	1,152	.11	.01	.01	.01	2.01	.10
TSS	1,152	.26	.07	.06	.07	10.61****	.21**
TSCAS	1,152	.28	.08	.07	.08	12.64****	.24****
TSE	1,152	.31	.10	.09	.10	16.09****	-.28****
TSI	1,152	.13	.02	.01	.02	2.54	-.12
TSH	1,152	.37	.13	.13	.13	23.59****	-.32****
TSEIH	1,152	.35	.12	.12	.12	21.49****	-.32****
TSAC	1,152	.17	.03	.02	.03	4.62*	.13

**** $p < .001$ *** $p < .005$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Gender emerged as a very significant predictor of cooperation (TSC), summed social skills (TSCAS), externalising behaviour (TSE), hyperactivity (TSH), and summed behaviour (TSEIH) $p < .001$, when entered before other variables, and in the final equation for each index of centre-based child care in which all the variables were entered simultaneously (Beta at the final step). Gender was also a significant predictor of self-control (TSS) when entered before other variables, $p < .001$, and slightly less significant in the final equation, $p < .01$. While gender significantly contributed to academic competence (TSAC) at point of entry this significance was not maintained in the final equation. These results suggest that being a girl is significantly associated with higher scores for measures of social skills, and lower scores for problem behaviour after allowing for the contribution of a range of personal, demographic and school factors and indexes of child care. It is worth noting here that comprehensive transition programs mediate negative factors.

Given the significance of other factors, particularly father occupation, relative family income, and school factors to the variance in measures of adjustment, interaction effects should be explored.

Discussion

Results of previous and current research suggest that gender is a significant contributor to measures of social skills and problem behaviour in the first year of schooling along with family demographics and school factors. It is important that early childhood staff and teachers in the early years of schooling are aware of the areas in which boys may experience difficulty and those boys whose backgrounds and experiences may increase their vulnerability to having difficulties adjusting to the first and subsequent years of schooling.

The identification of predictors of adjustment can assist professionals in preschool and the early years of schooling in determining the skills and attitudes that may assist children with the transition into the first year of schooling. Knowledge of these particular skills and abilities can also provide a focus for observations and planning for individuals and groups of children in early childhood programs and also in assessing the likelihood of children having difficulty adjusting to school.

Furthermore the implementation of effective transition to school programs designed to address the difficulties and challenges facing children as they commence the first year of schooling and including a focus on continuity of experience should also support children's adjustment to school.

It is this authors belief that teachers should be trained in and skilled at identifying children experiencing social, behavioural and academic difficulties and in the implementation of appropriate strategies that respond to these difficulties in such a way as to support the child in strengthening desired abilities. This also requires professionals to be aware of societal and their own gender-based stereotypical responses to children of each gender that may actually contribute to the social and behavioural difficulties to which boys are more vulnerable, and to modify their responses accordingly (Gash & Morgan, 1993; Good & Brophy, 1996).

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