

# How Playgroups Support and Develop Family and School Relationships

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# Setting

## Independent Public School in an urban suburb of Perth Western Australia

- Community is recognised as being socially and economically disadvantaged
- Low SEI index 87.64
- 40% children identified as developmentally vulnerable
- Cultural diversity with 26.4% of LBOTE
- AEDI identifies many of the students as being “developmentally at risk” or “developmentally vulnerable”



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# Families:

- Lack financial, social and educational resources and support
- Have minimal engagement with the school
- Poor attendance of children at school
- Negative aspirations for their children's future
- Signs of malnourishment
- Transient rate of 33%



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# Research has found that:

Engaging with families to develop positive and respectful relationships is considered a high priority in early childhood education (Dockett, Perry, Kearney, Hampshire, Mason & Schmied, 2009).

While it is recognised that family engagement plays a significant role in successful transitions, research has identified that some families from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to be involved in school transition programs and do not actively participate (Bernard Leer Foundation, 2007; Dockett et al, 2009).



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# Key Improvement Strategy of the School

## Intended Outcome:

Develop strong links with families and children (0-3 years) and promote a positive 'transition to school' program through the development and implementation of the playgroup.



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## Playgroup:

An organised gathering of parents and children who meet regularly to play and socialise

## Supported Playgroup:

Is operated by an organisation and usually facilitated by early childhood educators or community workers



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In Australia, supported playgroups have been developed with the aim of:

- stimulating children's development through quality early childhood experiences;
- increasing parental knowledge in relation to child development, early childhood learning and positive guidance skills;
- facilitating social networks;
- providing access to resources and information; and
- providing opportunities for the identification of developmental problems and referral to appropriate services (Jackson, 2013, pp. 80-81).



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# Playgroup Outcomes

## Taken from the schools Key Improvement Strategy

- Improve parental and community engagement;
- Improve the early learning and development of children;
- Increase children's readiness for school;
- Support families to create their own capacity to provide positive early developmental experiences for their children.



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# Research that supports these outcomes:

Data from the Longitudinal Study of Australia's Children (LSAC) between the periods of 2004 and 2008, identified playgroup participation for children from disadvantaged families, aged birth to three years, provides better outcomes in regards to children's social and emotional functioning and learning competence (Hancock, Lawrence, Mitrou, Zarb, Berthelson, Nicholson & Kubrick, 2012).

Such evidence points to the significance of participation in playgroup settings for disadvantaged families as being important predictors to later learning outcomes for young children.



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# Initial Pilot Study

- What does the supported playgroup offer to the participating families?
- What do families believe is the role of the school in facilitating transition?
- What strategies are effective in developing relationships between families, support professionals and school personnel?
- Does attending playgroup support families in the transition to the Kindergarten Year?



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# Outcomes of the Pilot Study

- Parenting skills were improved through modeling, discussions and information sessions;
- The learning and development outcomes of the children were improved;
- Children became familiar with the school environment and developed independence;
- Children developed ongoing relationships and attachment to staff at 'their school'.



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## The social networks between the school, parents and children provided many long term benefits:

- Parents viewed the school as a non-threatening environment and felt comfortable to talk with anyone at the school;
- Parents were more willing to help at the school, be involved in events and activities and be a part of the school community;
- Children established relationships at the school enabling them to transition to the 'big school'.



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# Aim of the Research:

- To track the cohort of kindergarten children who participated in the playgroup in 2012 in comparison to children in the same kindergarten class who may not have attended a playgroup
- To investigate how the supported playgroup at this school has contributed to the children's transition to school
- Take a three-fold approach that includes the school, children and families



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# Theoretical Framework

## Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979)

- Demonstrates a bi-directional influence between all stakeholders
- The child is embedded at the centre of several surrounding concentric circles representing multifaceted layers of the environment
- The interactions and relationships of the child influence surrounding contextual layers and these in turn influence the child
- Successful transition to school relies on positive connections between the child and the environment



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# Research Questions

1. How has the attendance at the supported playgroup in 2012 assisted in the children's social and emotional transition to Kindergarten?
2. How has the attendance at the supported playgroup in 2012 assisted in the children's positive learning dispositions in the Kindergarten?



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# Sources of Data

- Observations compiled of the children attending Kindergarten at the school (The focus of these observations addressed the children's social and emotional development and their learning dispositions)
- Questionnaires distributed to all Kindergarten parents
- Interview with the Principal, Deputy Principal and Kindergarten teacher
- Interviews with the pilot 2012 playgroup families regarding their child's preparedness to kindergarten and whether the transition contributed positively to their child's social and emotional well-being



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# The Children

- 46 children were enrolled in the Kindergarten
- Data was collected on 34 of these children of which:
  - ❖ 11 had attended the Supported Playgroup
  - ❖ 14 had not attended the Supported Playgroup
  - ❖ 1 had attended a different playgroup
  - ❖ 8 did not identify if they had attended a playgroup



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# Observations of Children

- Observed during normal class times
- An iPad was used for easy collection of data on the spot
- 12 items were included in an observation checklist
  - 7 were Social/Emotional Behaviours

*The Kindergarten & Pre-primary Profiles: social and emotional development indicators (Department of Education and Training, 2006)*

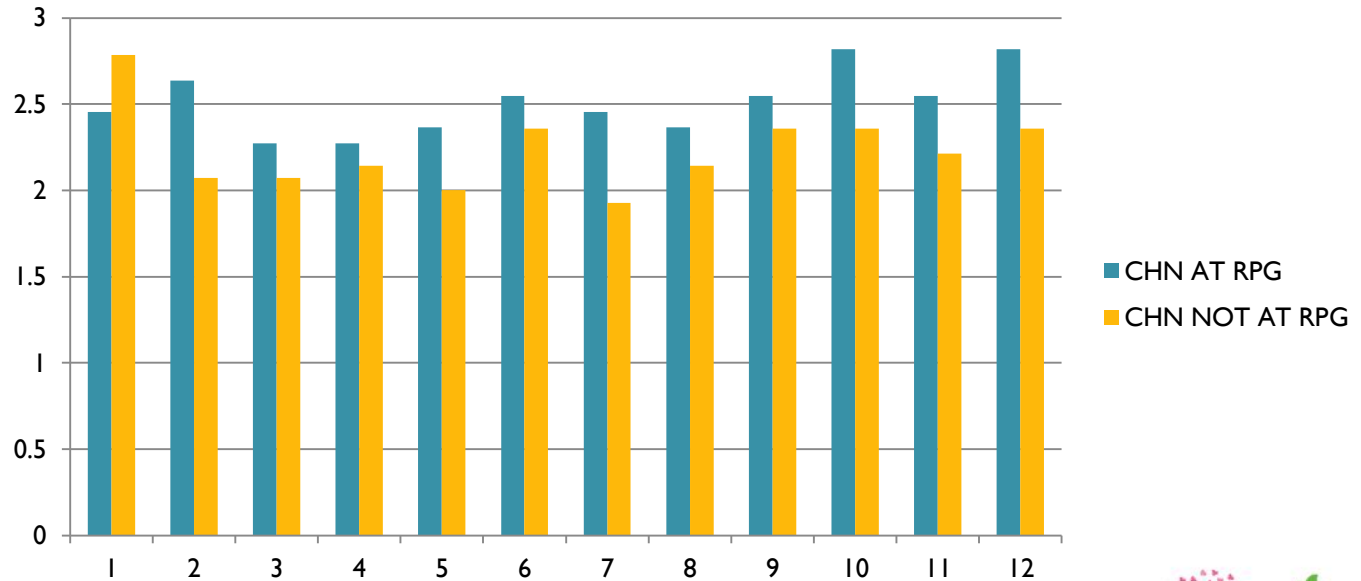
- 5 were Learning Dispositions

*Learning Dispositions Observation Sheet (Margaret Carr, 2001)*



<b>In a range of contexts, including play, the child...</b>	<b>Modelled</b> With adult/peer support and minimal child input	<b>Shared</b> Jointly undertaken by child and adult/peer	<b>Independent</b> Child takes leadership and/or works independently
<b>Separates from parents quickly</b>			
<b>Initiates interactions and responds positively to adults</b>			
<b>Initiates interactions and responds positively to peers</b>			
<b>Takes turns and cooperates with peers</b>			
<b>Regulates and takes responsibility for own behaviour</b>			
<b>Motivation: Body language shows involvement, interest, curiosity</b>			
<b>Concentration: Involved and not easily distracted, absorbed in task</b>			
<b>Perseverance: Wants to continue with the task</b>			
<b>Satisfaction: Displays satisfaction, contentment in their achievement</b>			
<b>Enjoyment: Having fun, taking pleasure, smiling, laughing, relaxed</b>			
<b>Responds to routines positively</b>			
<b>Comfortable in the Kindy environment</b>			

# Comparison of children who attended the Supported Playgroup and those who did not



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# Table of Differences in Scores

Item Number and Description	SPG	Non SPG	Difference
<b>Item 1 Separates quickly from parents</b>	2.454545	2.785714	<b>-0.331169</b>
<b>Item 2 Initiates interactions and responds positively to peers</b>	2.636364	2.071429	0.564935
<b>Item 3 Initiates interactions and responds positively to adults</b>	2.272727	2.071429	0.201298
<b>Item 4 Takes turns and cooperates with peers</b>	2.272727	2.142857	0.22987
<b>Item 5 Regulates and takes responsibility for own behaviour</b>	2.363636	2.0	0.36
<b>Item 6 Motivation: body language shows involvement, interest, curiosity</b>	2.545455	2.357143	0.188312
<b>Item 7 Concentration: involved and not easily distracted, absorbed in task</b>	2.454545	1.928571	0.525974
<b>Item 8 Perseverance: wants to continue with task</b>	2.363636	2.142857	0.220779
<b>Item 9 Satisfaction: displays satisfaction, contentment in their achievement</b>	2.545455	2.357143	0.188312
<b>Item 10 Enjoyment: having fun, taking pleasure, smiling, laughing, relaxed</b>	2.818182	2.357143	0.461039
<b>Item 11 Responds positively to routines</b>	2.545455	2.214286	0.331169
<b>Item 12 Comfortable in the Kindy environment</b>	2.818182	2.357143	0.461039

# Results

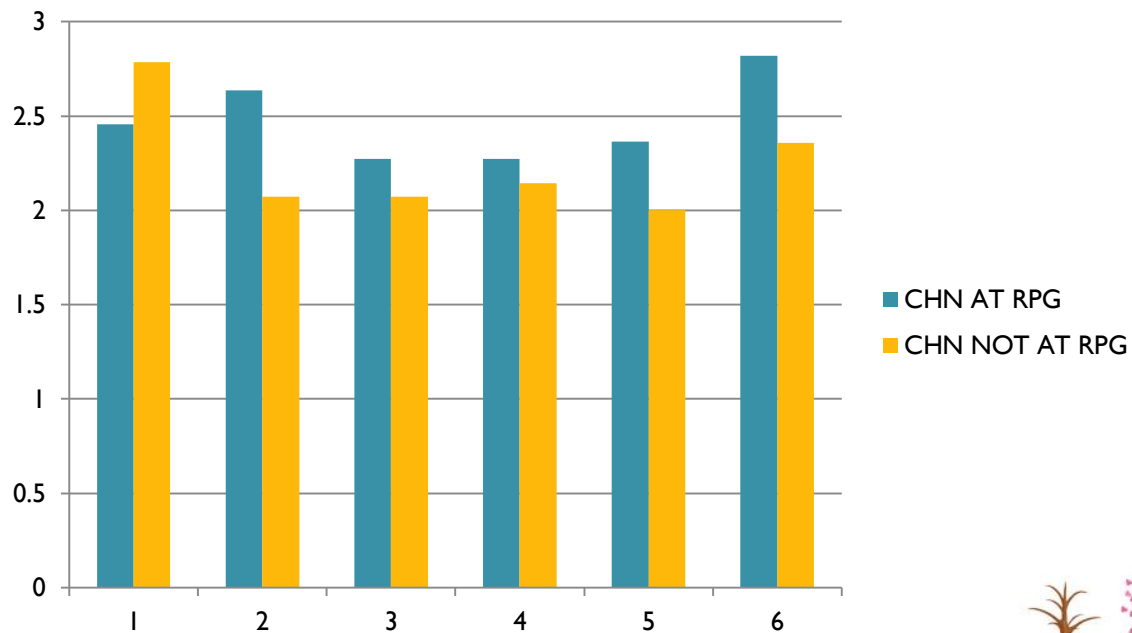
- Children who had attended the Supported Playgroup consistently had higher mean scores for individual items on the observation checklist
- Children who had attended the Supported Playgroup had higher overall mean scores- 30.09 v 26.78
- The one exception was Item 1: Separates from parents quickly



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# Social and Emotional Development



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# Social and emotional items with a significant difference

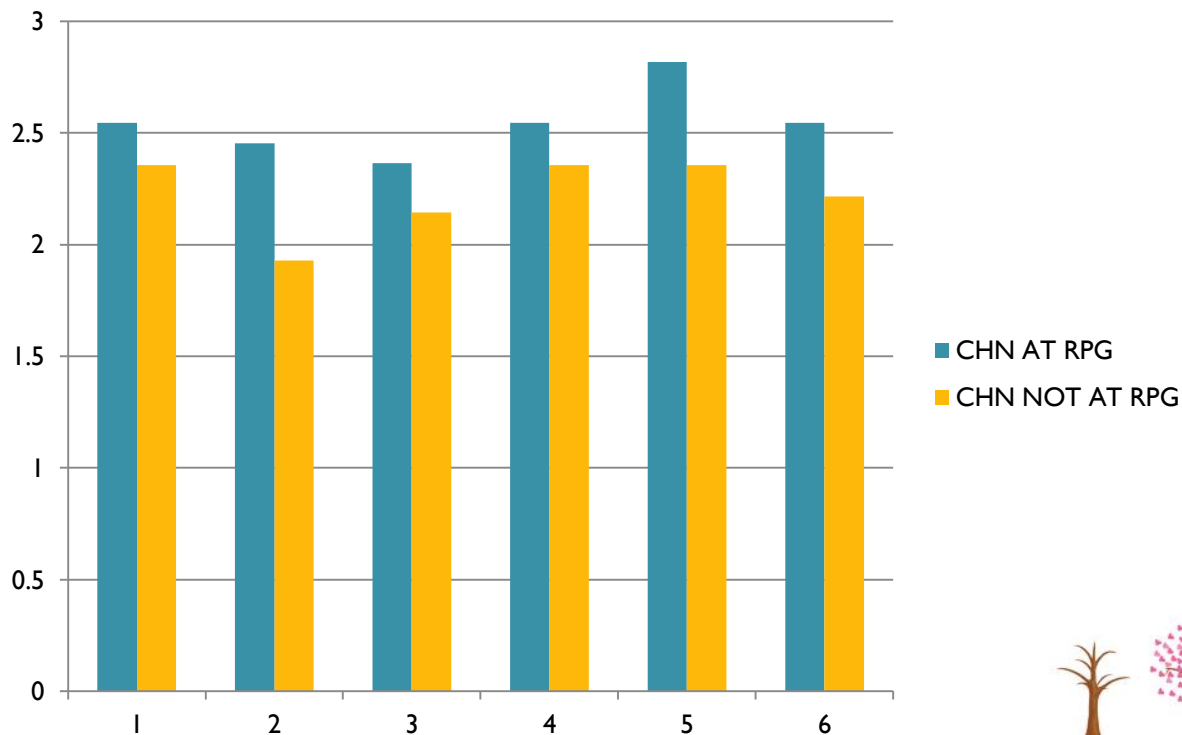
The following behaviours had a greater difference between the 2 groups (>0.4 difference)

- Item 2 - Initiates interactions and responds positively to peers
- Item 12 - Comfortable in the Kindergarten environment



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# Learning Dispositions



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# Learning Dispositions with a Significant Difference

The following dispositions had a greater difference between the 2 groups (>0.4 difference)

- ▶ Item 7 - Concentration: involved and not easily distracted, absorbed in task.
- ▶ Item 10 - Enjoyment: having fun, taking pleasure, smiling, laughing, relaxed.



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# Parent Questionnaires

Of the surveys that were handed out or sent home to all parents, 26 were returned

- Issues with the questionnaires included
  - Non-completion
  - Limited information
  - Contradicting information





# Interviews with the Pilot 2012 Playgroup Families

- All parents cited that their child had settled well into Kindergarten
- 9 out of 10 parents cited the playgroup as a factor in supporting their child's transition to kindergarten. 1 parent did not give any response.

Two reasons were noted specifically:

1. The development of a friendship group
2. The familiarisation with the school setting and staff



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# Response from Questionnaire to Settling into Kindergarten from Non-attendees at the Supported Playgroup

- 11 parents said that their child had settled into kindergarten
- The most commonly cited reasons for the positive transition:
  - The teacher
  - Siblings already in attendance at school



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# Interview with the Principal, Deputy Principal and Kindergarten Teacher

Children who attend the Supported Playgroup:

- Are able to cope with the structure of the day
- Tend to settle without fuss
- Have greater ability to commence initial sessions
- Demonstrate prior learning
- Are comfortable in the school environment

The parents are more relaxed and willing to talk with school staff



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# Summary of findings

- Children who attended the Supported Playgroup demonstrated more positive social and emotional responses to Kindergarten
- Children who attended the Supported Playgroup demonstrated more positive learning dispositions at Kindergarten
- Teachers and parents believe that children benefit from attending the Supported Playgroup



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# To conclude:

- Socioeconomic backgrounds have a major influence on educational performance and can be a predictor of a child's success at school (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2007).
- Focused interventions such as the provision of parenting education support systems and quality early childhood programs have found to be effective strategies for reducing inequalities and improving developmental outcomes for low socioeconomic communities.
- Transition programs that engage families are more effective for children of low socioeconomic status and children considered at risk (Berlin, 2010).



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