



Transition talk Children's voices on environments

Young children learn best when they are actively engaged in a constructive and interactive environment with a wide range of materials that allow learning to be meaningful to them (Department of Education and Training, 2015). During the transition to school, these environments also encourage children to develop agency over their learning and the choices that they can make, which has a strong impact on their learning outcomes over time.

The *Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool* recognises the importance of knowing and establishing a partnership with children to support active engagement in their own learning.

The open letter to Queensland principals, included below, has been developed to provide a platform for children's

perspectives on their learning environment, to be shared and understood. Considering children's opinions in transition is an essential ingredient in the development of high quality learning environments (Dockett & Perry, 2005).

200 children's voices

200 Children's Voices, a collaborative project run by the Metropolitan Region and Griffith University, provides us all with insight into the types of learning environments that children value most.

The project asked Queensland children in kindergarten and the early years of school who they like to learn with and from; as well as how, what and where they like to learn. The following letter contains a compilation of their responses.

Dear Queensland principals

We like to learn in spaces that are playful, peaceful, social and familiar.

Playful spaces

We like to learn in...

- 'the block area. I just build some castles and some buildings, but not something really high or they'll fall over.' – *Kindy child*
- 'home corner. I can play dress ups. I can be Ariel the mermaid 'cause it feels like I'm a mermaid... They make me get ideas.' – *Kindy child*
- 'the making area. I make things. Boxes and tape.' – *Kindy child*
- 'the sandpit,' 'the monkey bars' and 'outside.' – *Kindy children*
- 'the playground. You make a fairy garden in the sandpit. That can be a little home.' – *Prep child*
- 'at the sports. Because we do soccer sometimes. It's different because we don't run in the classroom.' – *Prep child*
- 'It helps me to learn by getting out of my chair and being active.' – *Year 2 child*



Astrid, six-year-old
Fun Friday – on Fun Friday
I like dressing up.



Julian, five-year-old
You can play soccer
outside on the oval.

Peaceful spaces

- 'We sit down upstairs and look at a book and then we read a story and if we can't read we just look at the pictures. We also play games up here.' – *Kindy child*
- 'In the library because we can see the books and we might see some interesting words.' 'It's a great place, it has lots of books that I like to read.' – *Prep children*
- 'Somewhere to have peace and quiet like a treehouse.' – *Prep child*



Andy, age unknown
I like the library.

Social spaces

- 'We just work as a team. Because you have to plan what you're going to make in your head and it takes lots of hard work.' – *Kindy child*
- 'I see people do it and then I try it.' – *Year 1 child*
- 'If you do groups, there is lots of fun stuff to do, like drawing, doing play dough, painting.' – *Year 1 child*
- 'In the fruit forest.' 'It's where we grow all our fruit.' – *Year 1 children*
- 'Friends can talk you through what you are supposed to do.' – *Year 2 child*

Familiar spaces

- 'Music and art, because my grandma is an artist and she's helped me paint some pictures before and I also learn the guitar, so that's why I like music as well.' – *Year 1 child*
- 'It would be fun if we could go back to kindy, back in time and bring the stuff that we wanted from kindy to school. We should still keep some learning but have more play.' – *Prep child*
- 'You can learn at school, in the playground and at home.' – *Year 2 child*

Most importantly, we think you 'should take in some of the students ideas of what to do and how to do it.' – *Year 2 child*

Yours sincerely,

Children from the Queensland Metropolitan Region

What does this mean for transitions?

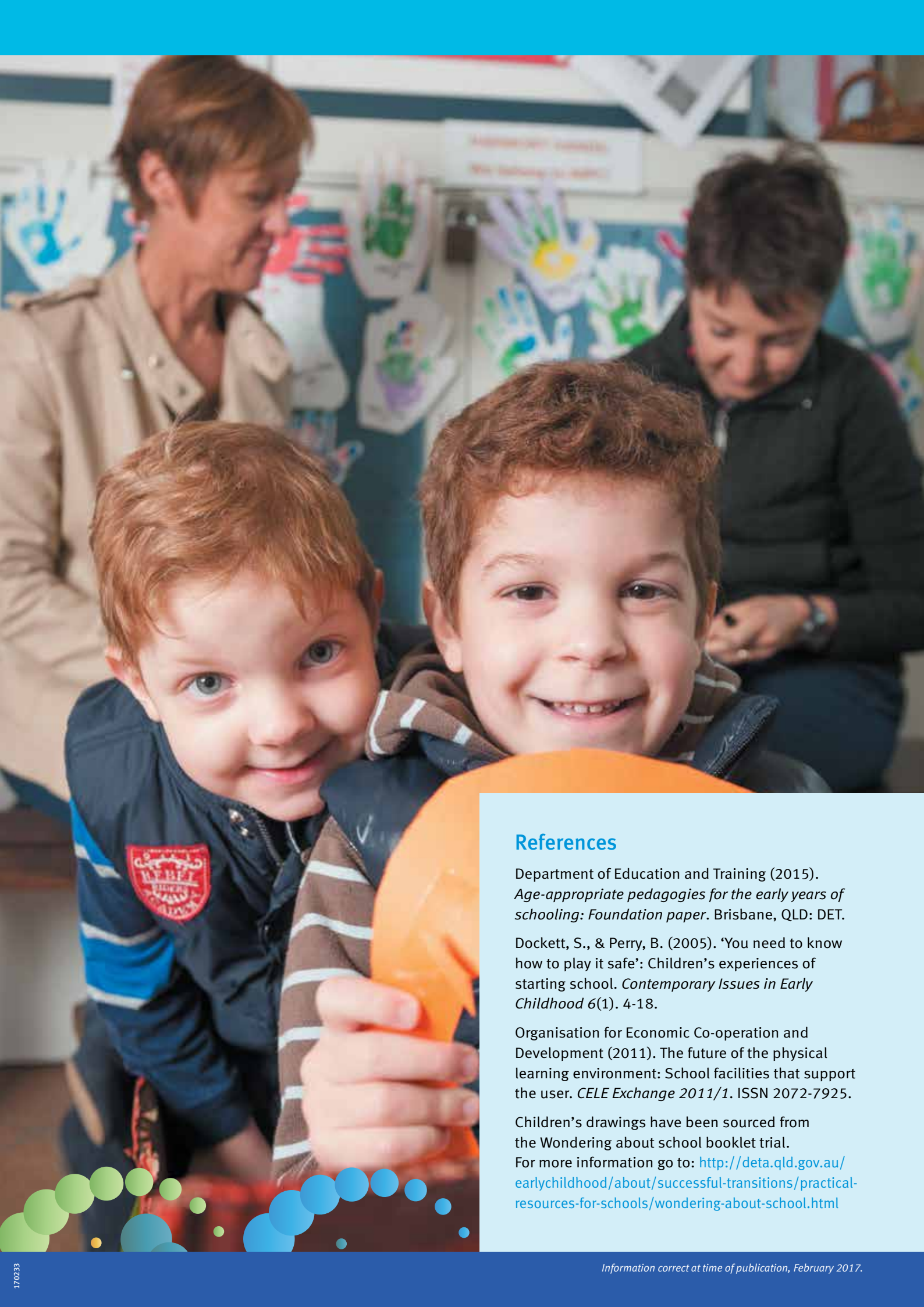
Evidence from the project was overwhelmingly clear — children value spaces that are playful, peaceful, social and familiar. In fact, more often than not, children identified spaces outside the classroom as most valuable.

They spoke about spaces that inspire their creativity, motivate them to extend on their ideas and engage them in an active learning process. Spaces that allow them to resource their own learning, engage with their peers and those that support continuity between their home and early childhood environments were highly valued.

As children transition to school, the learning environment becomes a particularly invaluable resource. The learning environment plays an important and often direct role in supporting children's engagement in their learning, the development of friendships and sense of belonging within a school (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011).

Children are both competent and capable of expressing their ideas and talking about their learning (Dockett & Perry, 2005). Reflection on the findings of the *200 Children's Voices* project found that the children seemed surprised to be asked what they thought about their learning. Knowing how important their opinion is, leaves us with the question: Why don't we seek their input more often?





References

Department of Education and Training (2015). *Age-appropriate pedagogies for the early years of schooling: Foundation paper*. Brisbane, QLD: DET.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2005). 'You need to know how to play it safe': Children's experiences of starting school. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 6(1). 4-18.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011). The future of the physical learning environment: School facilities that support the user. *CELE Exchange* 2011/1. ISSN 2072-7925.

Children's drawings have been sourced from the Wondering about school booklet trial. For more information go to: <http://deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/about/successful-transitions/practical-resources-for-schools/wondering-about-school.html>