Natalie Johnston-Anderson

Classroom behaviour and the early learning divide:
Behavioural changes and challenges in the transition to school

Natalie Johnston-Anderson is a recent graduate of the University of Sydney Master of Teaching (Honours) program. She has spent five years working in children’s services, including a range of early childhood and special education programs. In 2009 she is a kindergart-ten teacher at Australia Street Infants School.

This study analysed behaviour management policy documents from a range of childcare centres, preschools and primary schools, and connected the similarities and differences identified to the existing research on transition to school.

The results of this thesis suggest that the key classroom behavioural difference between prior-to-school and school settings is that the former adopt a “behaviour guidance” approach, whilst the latter use a range of “student discipline” approaches. These different approaches are founded on dissimilar philosophies of children’s behaviour and development, and result in distinctive teacher-child relationships unique to each sector.

The broader literature and research, however, suggests that continuity in relationships across the transition is optimal for children’s success. The range and depth of the differences identified suggests that the inconsistencies between prior-to-school and school behaviour management approaches contribute to the range of challenges that young children experience in the transition to school.