The first promotion: Self-concept and the transition from afternoon to morning sessions at kindergarten.

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Contents

Abstract

The present study examines the effects of transition from afternoon to morning sessions on the self-concept of children attending kindergarten. In particular, self-concept was examined in terms of gender. Twenty children were tested on three occasions over the transition period using the Dimensional Self-Perception Test for Preschoolers (DSTP). The DSTP was specifically constructed by the researcher for the purposes of the present study. Statistical analyses showed girls consistently scored higher on the Family, General and Kindergarten subscales than boys. Physical subscale scores of all participants increased over time. An interaction effect was found in the Peer subscale, with boys' scores decreasing over time as girls' scores increased. Further testing using the DSTP and larger sample sizes is recommended in order to extend these initial findings on the relationship between self-concept and the first promotion.

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand kindergartens have traditionally adopted a child-centred, free play approach to early education which still largely underpins practises and attitudes today (Bell, 1990). The positive social and emotional development of the young child is a major goal of this philosophy (Meade, 1985). Bell's (1990) study probing the beliefs and practices of six early childhood teachers in depth illustrates this fact:

> While most of the teachers made reference to the 'all round development' of children as the overriding goal of their centre programme, it was the psycho-social domain that was consistently emphasised. Social skills, good relationships, positive self esteem, 'caring and sharing', confidence and respect were stressed as the most important outcomes of the programme, with teachers often drawing on their own life experiences to support these views (p. 97-98).

A similar emphasis is also described by Ashby (1978) in preschool programmes in Australia. It would appear that the free-play environment is well suited to these espoused social-emotional goals. Texts designed for use by early childhood practitioners advocate the building of the young child's self-concept by providing activities particularly relevant to them in some way, and by allowing opportunity for free play and mastery of equipment (Beaty, 1992).

In the majority of New Zealand kindergartens, children begin by attending three afternoon sessions per week. As positions become available, the eldest of these children are 'promoted' to attending five morning sessions, and continue in this time slot until leaving for school.

Afternoon sessions, being comprised of younger children, are slightly shorter in duration, and teachers focus on familiarising children with kindergarten routines and equipment. On the other hand, morning sessions are longer in duration and generally allow the older children more opportunity for personal choice and creativity. However, some kindergartens also include a larger component of compulsory group time, through which children learn in a more formal manner prior to starting school.

In general, teachers claim various benefits from this age-stratified system. Social-emotional benefits, particularly the enhancement of self-concept, are amongst the highest ranking of these, in keeping with the overall emphasis on this aspect of development. Daniel (1993), although referring to transitions within daycare centres, echoes the kindergarten teacher's rubric in this respect.

> The first principle of conduct [with regard to transition] is to protect and nourish each child's psychosocial development ... [A smooth transition allows children to] make a positive growth step ... Appropriate adult intervention can help them build positive coping skills

(p. 20).

Mixed age grouping, where children attend equal numbers of either morning or afternoon sessions for their entire stay at kindergarten, is becoming an increasingly adopted alternative to the age-stratified dual session system (Katz, Evangelou & Hartman, 1990). Personal communications with various Kindergarten Associations around New Zealand have indicated a similar trend, with some 8 % of kindergartens surveyed trialling variations of mixed age or 'whanau' grouping. Proponents of this system also cite enhanced self-concept as an outcome (Greenberg, 1990), making it a subject worthwhile of further study in order to clarify just how self-concept may be affected by the two different sessional structures.

The transition from early childhood centre to school has been well researched both in this country and overseas (e.g., Cleave, Jowett & Bate, 1982; Cullen, 1987; Renwick, 1984). Similar attention has been given to the transition from home to early childhood centre (e.g., Blatchford, Battle & Mays, 1982). However, an extensive search has been unsuccessful in locating any material relating to within-centre transition in preschools, suggesting that it has not yet been empirically explored.

Historically, it has been asserted that parents and family are the main (if not only) influence on the young child's emerging self-concept (Burns, 1982). However, more

recent research has indicated that the peer group influences children much sooner than originally thought, and is not to be underestimated in terms of self-concept development. Fraser and Gurney (1988) noted that children as young as three perceive peers as sources of self-esteem. A general assumption could be made, therefore, that when the child's peer reference group is suddenly changed (as in transition), an impact on self-concept can occur.

Although the teaching staff and basic environment of the kindergarten remain unchanged, routines, playmates and teacher or parental expectations may change dramatically. It is feasible that these factors alone may cause some children's self-concept to falter or change in some way. Blatchford, Battle and Mays (1982) note that children's reactions to starting preschool can be diverse, and the same may well be true of 'the first promotion'.

Anecdotal evidence from kindergarten teachers appear to support this assumption. Some children find it difficult to adjust to suddenly being the youngest, after having fulfilled the role of 'king pin' in the afternoon sessions, whilst others are confident that they know it all, having been told by parents they are now a "big morning kindy kid". Some children, not understanding that the terms "morning kindy" and "afternoon kindy" are in reference to the time slot, become quite distressed when they discover they are being taken back to the same building!

These diverse reactions to change in a small child's environment are cause for some concern to parents and teachers alike, at various times. Examining the transition process from the viewpoint of the child's self-perceptions may help the adults involved to demystify the situation, and assist in facilitating a less stressful transition for all.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As a construct, self-concept has long been recognised as influential in the attainment of desirable life outcomes such as achievement, success and personal well-being. Thus, it has been of particular interest to educators seeking to maximise the learning and motivation potential of their students. The nett result of this interest has been a rich history of discussion and research through which self-concept and its related constructs have been defined and redefined in countless different ways (Hattie, 1992; Marsh, 1990; Wylie, 1974).

Historically, the self-concept was viewed in a global fashion as the sum total of one's perceptions regarding the self. Thus, self-concept measures of the time reflected this view and consisted of a diverse range of items with one total self-concept score (e.g., Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, 1967; Sears Self-Concept Inventory, 1963). Such global self scores effectively hid nuances of change within self-concept subscales, and could rarely be compared meaningfully with those gleaned from another measure. Marsh (1990) stated that such "agglomerate use of general self-concept is dubious, and probably has led to many of the contradictory findings which abound in self-concept research" (p. 94).

In a comparative study of four different self-esteem measures administered to 20 preschoolers, McDowell and Lindholm (1986) concluded support for the differentiated

rather than global organisation of self-regard scales.

Current thinking now acknowledges that performance, enjoyment, expertise or confidence may be high in one particular facet of life, but not so in another, affecting self-concept differentially in these areas. Therefore, current models of self-concept involve distinct multi-dimensional components (e.g., physical, social, and academic self-concept), although the number and nomenclature of these components are still being debated and revised (see Hattie, 1992; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976).

Self-concept is also now considered to be hierarchically organised. Situation-specific perceptions of behaviour are at the base of the hierarchy, moving up through the subareas such as physical or academic, on to more general inferences about the self at the apex (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Not surprisingly, the self-concept is seen as more stable and enduring at this top level, with situation- and behaviour-specific perceptions being somewhat more susceptible to change. Self-perceptions (and thus self-concept) are formed by interaction with one's environment. "They are influenced especially by evaluations by significant others, reinforcements, and attributions for one's own behaviour" (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985, p.107)

Hormuth's (1990) ecological definition of self-concept emphasises the interactive aspect of the construct. Self concept is described as "a conjunction of other people,

environments and objects ... the external elements of the ecological system are reflected in self-related cognitions" (p. i). Hormuth therefore asserts that a change in life circumstances will most often necessitate a corresponding adjustment to the self-concept.

Hattie (1992) outlines this process of adjustment:

> self-conceptions are cognitive appraisals of attributes about ourselves. These appraisals are frequently examined, and if the concepts are not confirmed they are either changed or the evidence can be disregarded. Confirmation usually tells us little about whether or not our concept is correct, but it can serve as a reinforcer and make acceptance of disconfirmation more difficult. Receiving disconfirmation is more likely to lead to changes in our conceptions of self (p. 10).

Furthermore, during this transitional time, Hormuth (1990) asserts that "the self-concept is made salient until the once-new environment becomes familiar" (p. 5).

Self-concept and Transition

A literature review undertaken by Banaji and Prentice (1994) of self-concept research concurs that periods of life transition are influential to the outcome of self-regulatory processes. Marsh (1990) argues that it is only logical that life changes should be reflected in changes in self-concept, and that "the easiest way to change self-concept, perhaps, is to alter the frame of reference that individuals use to evaluate

their accomplishments" (p. 163). Research evidence from throughout the human lifespan supports this assertion. The self-concepts of children as young as 3 years old were found to be strongly correlated to their parent's scores on a Parental Authority scale (Flynn, 1993). Kozlowski (1993) noted that 5 year old girls enrolled in a preballet programme had higher self-concepts than their peers.

Differences have been documented in school children's self-concept according to features of their classroom environment. For instance, Henderson (1984) found that children in multi-age classes scored higher on happiness and satisfaction scales than those in single-age classrooms. 'Open' classrooms also appear more likely to enhance children's self-concept when compared to structured, traditional environments (Horwitz, 1976). However, an early study by Perkins (1958) found little or no relationship between changes in classroom climate and children's self-concept.

Blackbourn (1988) studied the effect of different preschool experience on the self-concept of educable mentally retarded first-graders and found evidence that an integrated preschool programme was associated with subsequent development of positive self-concept.

Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman and Midgely (1991) monitored the self-esteem and self-perceptions of young adolescents over their transition from elementary to junior high school. It was found that these constructs changed over

time, and that the changes were "systematically related to changes in the social lives of these adolescents" (p. 559). Friendships amongst adolescents have also been identified as having distinctive effects on the various domains of self-perception by Berndt and Keefe (1993). Further along the life-span, some self-concept variability is evident even in late adulthood over the transition to retirement (Hooker,1991).

Self-concept and Gender

Gender differences are apparent in much of the self-concept research, and are generally consistent with traditional sex stereotyping (Marsh, 1989, 1990). Overall, boys have a slightly higher general self concept than their female counterparts. This may be explained in part by Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) findings that both sexes rate traditionally 'male' qualities higher than those usually assigned to females. 'Women's work' was also rated lower than 'men's work' by all participants in their study. Thus, if societal norms and attitudes have been absorbed so totally by children, it is not surprising that their perceptions of self would be aligned in this way.

Hinde, Tamplin and Barrett (1993) discovered some gender differences in the correlates of 4 year olds' behaviour during three replications of a study, although the self-concept data were unclear due to the small sample size. However, the authors did find the data to be "in harmony with the view that boys, but not girls, like to see themselves as aggressive to

peers, and that those who are not aggressive tend to have low self-esteem ..."(Hinde, Tamplin and Barrett, 1993, p. 616).

Greater sex differences are evident amongst the various dimensions of self concept. For example, boys have consistently been found to score higher on a physical ability self-concept subscale than their female counterparts, whilst girls rate higher on reading subscales than their male peers (Marsh, Craven & Debus, 1991; Marsh, 1989). Other less pronounced sex differences noted in these studies in favour of girls include verbal language, school satisfaction, honesty, trustworthiness, congeniality, sociability and neatness. Boys, on the other hand, score higher on such subscales as maths, emotional stability, problem solving, and physical appearance. Marsh (1990) was unable to find any sex differences within parental self-concept, and found that effects were mixed amongst social self-concept, and not consistent with stereotypes.

In concluding their own study of the effects of transition on the self-perceptions of early adolescents Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman & Midgely (1991) offer an important point in considering sex differences and self-concept:

> We are unsure whether this finding reflects true gender differences in self-esteem or response bias, because boys tend to be more self-congratulatory than girls in their responses to self-report measures (Maehr & Nicholls,

> 1980), whereas girls may be more modest in their self-reports (Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984) (p. 563)

Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) also consider this may be a mitigating factor in the search for gender differences, noting that girls are more willing to disclose their weaknesses, thus effectively handicapping their scores.

Self-concept and Preschool Children

Although writers and researchers in the field of self-concept generally agree that early experiences play a crucial role in the development of self-concept (Eder, 1988; Gurney, 1988), there is a relative dearth of studies involving preschool children. This fact is keenly noted by Keller, Ford and Meacham (1978):

> That the child's sense of self develops early in life has been suggested often in theoretical discussions ... but thus far there have been few investigations of the self-concept of the young child and no empirical reports on the content dimensions of the early self-concept (p. 483).

More recent literature reviews indicate that the intervening 15 years since Keller et al's summation have brought about little improvement in this area (See Marsh, Craven & Debus, 1991; Davis, 1993). It is apparent that the developmental idiosyncrasies of preschoolers have long been considered too great an obstacle in conducting meaningful self-concept research. Traits such as all-or-none thinking and overt

willingness to please, coupled with emergent language comprehension and a tendency to live in the 'here and now' present the researcher with a plethora of measurement problems (Harter, 1982, 1983; Harter & Pike, 1984; Marsh, 1989). Such problems will be explored more fully with regard to the development of the instrument used in the present study.

Fortunately, there have been and continues to be a small number of researchers prepared to deal with the inherent problems of exploring the young child's self-perceptions. One such person is Rebecca Eder, who has carried out a large amount of work in the early childhood sector looking at the emergent psychological selves of preschoolers, and the role of memory in this process (Eder, 1988, 1989, 1990; Eder, Gerlach & Perlmutter, 1987). Eder's work suggests that by the age of 3 1/2, a child's self-system is multi-dimensional and stable for the most part, giving some hope to those who might attempt to assess the self-concepts of younger children. Eder's innovative testing procedure involved using identical pairs of puppets to present opposing pairs of statements to children, who then chose which puppet was 'like them'.

Harter and Pike (1984) devised a non-text version of Harter's (1982) Perceived Competence Scale for Children to assess the domain-specific self-judgements of preschool and (American - 5 year old) kindergarten children. Children as

young as 4 were shown dichotomous pairs of pictures depicting children in various situations relating to competence and social acceptance. The child was given a brief statement regarding the children depicted, and then chose which of the two children she is most like. A four point scale was introduced by then asking the child whether she is 'a lot' or 'a little' like the child she has chosen. Four subscales were tested, two relating to perceived competence (physical and cognitive), and two relating to social acceptance (maternal and peer). Amongst research findings was that young children who had attended the test school for less than two months had significantly lower scores for 'peer acceptance' than their more settled peers. Longitudinal data would be helpful to determine if these scores rose after a period of time.

Harter and Pike maintain that "the pictorial format engages the young child's interest, is understandable, sustains the child's attention, and leads to more meaningful responses" (p. 1970). A fifth subscale included in the original version of the test, general self-worth, was dropped from this version. This omission was justified by the statement that children under the age of 8 are incapable of making reliable judgements about their self-worth in general terms. However, subsequent research with 5-8 year olds refutes this claim (Marsh, Craven & Debus, 1991), and will be discussed in more detail in reference to the development of the instrument for the present study.

In a much cited study, Keller, Ford and Meacham (1978) tested preschool children's responses to open ended questions and incomplete sentences about themselves. It was found that all age groups showed a significant preference for action- rather than body-referent statements. The suggestion is thus made that "the item composition of instruments used to measure self-esteem of preschool children should reflect the salience of the action dimension in the young child's self-definition (Keller, Ford & Meacham, 1978, p. 489).

In consideration of the existing literature, the overriding aim of the present study is to explore the relationship between 'the first promotion' and the self-concept of young children. The identification of any gender differences in the effect this transition has on the young participants will be a more specific aim. One may hypothesise according to the current literature that boys, going into the transition with a higher level of self-concept than girls, may be less adversely affected by the move.

Identifying any patterns of change in self-concept across time is another aim of this study. A longitudinal format will be used in order to determine whether children's self-concept returns to its original level after a settled period of attendance at morning kindergarten, or whether it actually increases, thus exonerating the kindergarten teachers' claims.

Due to the relative dearth of information relating to internal early childhood centre transition, it is considered appropriate that the focus of the present study be primarily of an exploratory nature. Although practical experience and discussion with other kindergarten teachers have resulted in the formation of some rudimentary theories regarding the effect of transition on self-concept, the research questions have been couched in neutral terms.

Research Questions

1. What are the effects of transition from afternoon to morning sessions on the five main subscales of children's self-concept?
2. Are boys' and girls' self-concepts affected differentially?
3. Does self-concept change noticeably after a settled period of attendance in the morning session?

METHOD

Participants

A suburban kindergarten in a provincial city was selected for the purposes of the present study. In order to protect the anonymity of participants and their families, this kindergarten will be referred to as Finn Street kindergarten. A three-teacher kindergarten in a relatively new state housing area, Finn Street kindergarten has morning and afternoon rolls of 45 children. The community from which Finn Street draws is made up of middle to low socio-economic status families, with a large number of single parent families and very young mothers. A large proportion of the population is transient, often leaving or moving back to town unexpectedly. The kindergarten roll accurately reflects the ethnic mix of the community, with 48% European, 50% Maori and 2% Asian/Indian children attending. Children are generally admitted to afternoon sessions at approximately 3 years, 4 months, and 'graduate' to morning sessions at 4 years, 2 months. A postal survey of kindergartens in the Manawatu Association conducted by the researcher confirm that these admission ages are the average.

New Zealand kindergartens are diverse in the manner in which their daily programmes are run. Although each kindergarten strives to conform to the National Early Childhood Curriculum 'Te Whariki' (1996), anecdotal evidence suggests that individual interpretations of this document

result in the curriculum goals being implemented in a variety of ways.

At Finn Street, as in many kindergartens, morning sessions differ somewhat from that of the afternoon. Staff consider the prime directives for the afternoon sessions are the building of relationships between staff and children, and the beginnings of socialisation. A single mat-time at the end of the session introduces the children to simple songs and fingerplays, but is primarily of a 'housekeeping' nature - making sure children and their belongings are collected by caregivers in an orderly fashion.

The morning sessions are considered by staff to have a totally different atmosphere. Although child-directed play is a central feature to both sessions, more is expected of the older child attending morning kindergarten. Morning sessions contain an extra mat-time, which is held at the beginning of session, and focuses more closely on songs and activities relating to the kindergarten programme. Following mat-time, children choose a story to listen to, and go with the appropriate staff member to hear this.

Another major difference is the introduction of Group Day. Children in the morning sessions are placed into one of three groups, at the staff's discretion. Once a week after morning mat-time, children work within these groups at a specific activity with a staff member, rotating each week. Activities are chosen and planned for by the teacher, and may

involve a physical challenge or new experience for the children, such as an obstacle course or science experiment. Children are expected to participate at some level. Staff utilise these situations to make detailed observations of children's behaviour and levels of functioning. A final difference between sessions is the introduction of baking into the morning programme.

All children moving from afternoon to morning sessions during the data collection period of 10 months were potential participants. However, children without written parental consent (see Appendices A and B), or those who refused to participate themselves were excluded (three children). Data from those children who willingly began testing, but refused on subsequent retests was also removed from the study (five children). The remaining participants numbered 20. The extremely low number of children making this transition over such a long timespan is testament to the large number of children transferring into the area (Children who have been attending morning kindergarten elsewhere are commonly given first preference into the morning session to ensure continuity for them). Over the same 10 month span, 47 children ineligible to be participants due to little or no afternoon session attendance (at Finn Street kindergarten) were admitted directly into the morning programme.

The length of the waiting list and the rate of the eldest children turning five meant that the participants were aged

between 4 years, 2 months and 4 years, 5 months at the time of transition.

The relatively random method of selecting participants meant that gender and ethnicity variables were not able to be equally represented. Participants were made up of eight boys and 12 girls. Parental identification of ethnicity of child identified 12 European, seven Maori and one Samoan participants. All children were fluent in the English language.

Procedure

The Dimensional Self-Perception test for Preschoolers (appendix C) was individually administered to participants on three separate occasions. The first, a pretest to establish baseline data, was given two (2) afternoon session attendances prior to transition. Two post-tests were administered after three (3) and twenty (20) attendances in the morning session or as close to these times as possible, as circumstances allowed.

Testing took place during kindergarten sessions in the kindergarten office. The researcher played alongside the participants and initiated friendly contact with them. As opportunities arose, she introduced herself and asked the children if they wished to "play a game in the office with some puppets". The door was left ajar throughout testing and the design of the office was such that the rest of the kindergarten was easily visible. Upon completion of testing, participants received a jellybean and a stamp on the hand. This proved to

be a powerful incentive for subsequent post-test occasions when the novelty of the 'game' had worn thin.

Development of Instrument

In reviewing the most commonly used assessment procedures, it was necessary to consider the relevance of the scoring system in relation to the present study. Early instruments which yield only a single, global score of self-concept (e.g., Joseph, 1979; Muller & Leonetti, 1974; Woolner, 1966) are of little use in answering the research question that relates to specific subscales of self. A multi-dimensional assessment with separate scores relating to self-concept subscales was required.

Coller (1971) reviewed a number of self-report instruments for use with young children, but noted an all too common problem - "... it must be reported that no instruments in this section have been validated sufficiently" (p. 46). However, he concludes that "in general, measures of the reports on symbolically contrived situations variety seem to be especially useful to assess the self-concept of the younger child, and should be further investigated" (p. 46). Indeed, the self-concept research conducted since that time with preschool children has largely relied upon this method to provide the necessary data, sometimes in combination with observational and anecdotal methods.

The Dimensional Self-Perception Test for Preschoolers (DSTP) was developed specifically for the purposes of the

present study, as the literature search failed to reveal any measures that were entirely suitable. Many of the tests used in previous studies proved too lengthy for administration to 4 year olds, having been originally devised for older children. In addition to this, the content and focus of many items in the tests were somewhat inappropriate for use with New Zealand children. A common problem was an overemphasis of traditional 'school learning' within the cognitive subscale items. It must be noted that the American use of the term 'kindergarten' does not equate to New Zealand centres, being more akin to new entrant classes at primary school. Thus, tests developed in America for 'kindergarten' children are often developmentally more advanced. Items such as 'gets stars on paper' and 'knows alphabet' (Harter and Pike, 1982) are not as relevant for preschoolers in New Zealand, given the developmental 'free play' approach adopted by the majority of early childhood centres. Cultural differences were also highlighted with the content, wording (and in some cases, illustration) of some items being too 'Americanised' for New Zealand preschoolers to relate to.

Assessment tools for use with preschoolers must take the idiosyncrasies of young children into consideration. Non-text related tests are needed, given that the great majority of preschoolers are preliterate. Tests should also take into account the preschooler's shorter attention span and fickle powers of concentration. Davis (1993) notes that any

instrument used with young children should be as short as possible. However, the disadvantage of this requirement is a detrimental effect on reliability.

In addition to these practical limitations, it is often difficult to obtain accurate responses to test items due to a number of confounding factors. Davis (1993) recognises the challenges involved in determining whether or not children even understand the tasks we set before them. Young children are driven by a desire to please adults, and tend to give socially desirable answers in many situations. This often leads to inflated scores, with little variability across the participant group. These high levels can make meaningful interpretation of the data dubious at best (Davis, 1993).

Harter and Pike's (1984) pictorial instrument appears to be a novel way to circumvent a number of the difficulties faced when testing preschoolers. However, modifications to some of the items and illustrations would have been necessary in order to make the test suitable for use in this country. Of greater concern is the non-verbal emphasis of the test. It is plausible that some children may randomly point to a picture with little understanding of the question. Marsh, Craven and Debus (1991) were also critical of the factorial structure of Harter and Pike's test. Marsh et al's research involved the individual administration of a modified, oral version of the Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ-1) to children as young as five, and found support for the inclusion of a general self-

worth scale for children this age. Contrary to popular belief, it was also claimed that the 64-item test was within the attention span of these children, and that a positive practice effect had occurred by the end of the administration.

To temper these findings, Davis' (1993) quest to find a suitable instrument for use with preschool children also led her to consider an oral version of SDQ-1. Her findings were somewhat less favourable. Both children and interviewers reported the test to be lengthy and repetitive, and yielded very high, homogeneous scores. Although Davis originally stated her intent to try a shortened version of the test, she has become convinced that the quantitative approach may not be feasible with children this age (Personal Communication, 1996). The young child's eagerness to please adults coupled with their inflated sense of self has led her to consider a combined quantitative/qualitative approach.

In consideration of the shortcomings and criticisms inherent in almost every test examined, it was decided that an amalgamation of the best aspects from a number of tests would provide a workable solution for the needs of the present study. Thus, the basic format of the DSTP was modelled on the Children's Self-View Questionnaire (Eder, 1992). Eder's measure was considered unsuitable for use in its original form due to the prohibitive number of test items (62). Dimensions measured were also incongruous with the research aims of the present study, being psychological in nature. However, the

questionnaire provided a novel method of delivering the items to young children that would hold their interest, and was not dependent on reading ability or vocabulary recall - all major considerations when testing preschoolers. An identical pair of large puppets was used by the interviewer to present dichotomous statements to the child. The puppets would describe themselves, and the child asked to recognise him/herself. Items within Eder's questionnaire had been gleaned from extensive interviews with preschool children, and reflected their tendency toward general (that is, not temporally located), behaviour-based statements (see also Keller, Ford & Meacham, 1978).

The DSTP utilised the same puppet technique to deliver 25 pairs of opposing statements to the participants. The puppets were deliberately plain in design, fashioned from a pair of colourful sports socks. It was felt that commercially made puppets in the form of a recognisable character (such as the Grover puppets used by Eder) might distract or confuse the children, who may identify the statements with their knowledge of the television persona. Also, homemade sock puppets are likely to already be present in early childhood centres, making them familiar (rather than frightening or off-putting) to the children. The puppets were androgynous to avoid any confounding gender-bias.

The puppets were manipulated by the interviewer atop a small screen which shielded the scoring paper (and responses

being recorded) from the participant.

Items for the DSTP were initially selected and adapted by the researcher from a number of existing measures. Perkin's (1958) research with 4th grade children involved a collection of 50 self-referrent statements which provided a useful starting point. These statements had, in turn, been gleaned from a universe of statements collected from children in a study by Jersild (1952). Marsh's Self Description Questionnaire (1990) and Harter and Pike's (1984) Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children also provided a selection of test items.

Items were adapted or reworded as necessary, and first draft copies were examined by a number of early childhood professionals for their feedback. Modifications were made, and a working draft containing 32 items was developed for piloting. The test was then piloted with six children the same age as the participants to check for format and comprehension.

In line with previous research, items were couched in behavioural terms and were grouped into five subscales: General, Family, Peer, Physical and Kindergarten Related. The general subscale was included in deference to Marsh, Craven and Debus' (1991) research as outlined earlier, even though there is debate regarding young children's abilities to describe themselves in general terms.

It was considered necessary to rename Harter and Pike's

(1984) maternal subscale to reflect the diverse family structures of the 1990's, and the increasing influence of male members of the household on children's self-concept. Items within the family subscale included either or both parents as appropriate to each participant. Children were asked "Who lives in your house with you?" at the beginning of each test, and items were reworded accordingly. Initial formulation and wording of items in the family subscale proved problematic due to the 'emotional loading' of the negative information within the items. For example, item F2:

My Mum/Dad smile at me a lot

My Mum/Dad growl at me a lot

may appear to be asking children to report on the parenting practices within their family. However, it must be remembered that these are statements of self-perception. Marsh (1989) notes that "so long as [children's] responses accurately reflect their self-perceptions, whether or not these self-perceptions are realistic when judged by external standards, the interpretations made on the basis of the self-concept responses are valid" (p. 427).

The Physical subscale included items that referred to both physical ability and physical appearance. Harter's (1984) instrument omits any reference to the latter, stating that children of this age are capable only of self-description in behavioural terms, and that self-conceptions relating to general traits (smart, good looking, etc.) are an indicator of a

more advanced state of development. However, 2 items have been included in the DSTP as it is felt that even as young as 4 years old, children have an opinion of their own appearance, and are able to express it. Society places much emphasis upon physical attributes, and this is reinforced often to our children 'what a pretty girl/handsome young man you are' etc. Children also hear the judgements we make about others, and thus form their own opinions.

The 'Kindergarten related' subscale replaces the usual 'academic' label, due to the broader emphasis of the curriculum at early childhood level. Items within this subscale cover a wide range of behaviours, including specific skill levels (use of scissors/stapler), curriculum area preference (inside/outside), prewriting, group participation, and independence from the teachers. As it is anticipated that this will be the subscale most affected by transition, it is also the subscale containing the most items (11).

RESULTS

Each item in the Dimensional Self-Perception Test for Preschoolers (DSTP) scored either 1 (for a positive response) or 0 (for the negative statement). Items within each of the five subscales were added to form a subscale score. Mean pre- and post- transition self-concept subscale scores by gender on the DSTP are shown in Table1. Subscale scores were treated by means of a 2 (Gender) by 3 (Time) analysis of variance with repeated measures. Gender was the between-subjects factor, and Time was the within-subjects factor.

Table 1

DSTP subscale scores pre- and post- transition as a function of gender.

Subscales	Pre-Test		Post-Test 1		Post-Test 2	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Family						
Boys	4.25	1.39	4.00	1.85	4.13	1.36
Girls	5.25	0.87	5.25	0.97	4.92	1.08
General						
Boys	3.63	1.30	3.88	1.73	3.88	1.13
Girls	4.58	0.67	4.67	0.49	4.83	0.39
Kindergarten						
Boys	6.50	2.00	6.50	1.93	6.38	1.30
Girls	8.17	1.27	7.75	1.60	8.83	0.83
Peer						
Boys	3.25	1.67	3.25	1.49	2.50	0.93
Girls	3.08	1.08	2.67	0.89	3.67	1.07
Physical						
Boys	3.13	0.83	3.63	1.93	4.13	0.83
Girls	3.75	1.29	4.25	0.87	4.33	0.78

Boys n = 8

Girls n = 12

Statistical analysis of the Family subscale scores revealed a significant main effect for Gender $F(1,18) = 4.74$, $p<.05$. Mean scores for the Family subscale, as displayed in Figure 1, illustrate that this effect was caused by girls scoring consistently higher than boys. There was no main effect for Time $F(1,18) = 0.66$, $p>.05$, and there was no significant interaction effect $F(1,18) = 0.14$, $p>.05$.

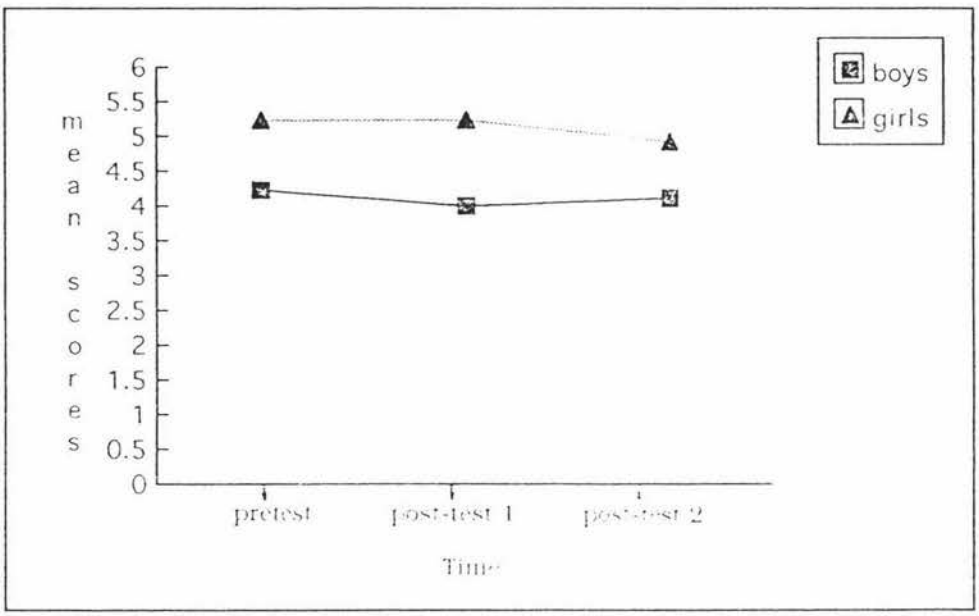

Figure 1: DSTP Family Subscale Mean scores by Gender

A significant main effect was found for Gender $F(1,18) = 6.69$, $p< .02$ for General subscale scores. An examination of the mean DSTP scores (Table 1) indicates that this effect was due to girls obtaining higher overall General subscale scores than the boys on all testing occasions. No main effect for Time $F(1,18) = 1.22$, $p>.05$, or interaction effect $F(1,18) = 0.00$,

$p>.05$ was found. Mean scores for the General subscale are displayed in Figure 2.

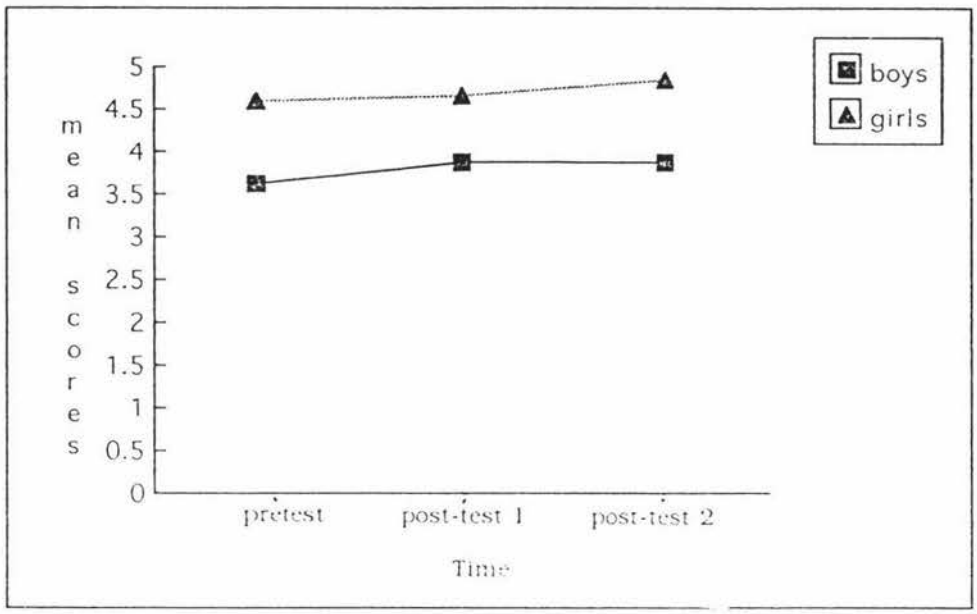

Figure 2: DSTP General Subscale Mean scores by Gender

The Kindergarten subscale scores yielded another main effect for Gender, $F(1,18) = 10.23$, $p< .01$. This effect was also caused by girls obtaining significantly higher scores in this subscale across the three testing occasions. No Time $F(1,18) = 1.08$, $p>.05$ or interaction $F(1,18) = 2.30$, $p>.05$ effects were observed for the Kindergarten subscale. Mean scores for this subscale are presented in Figure 3.

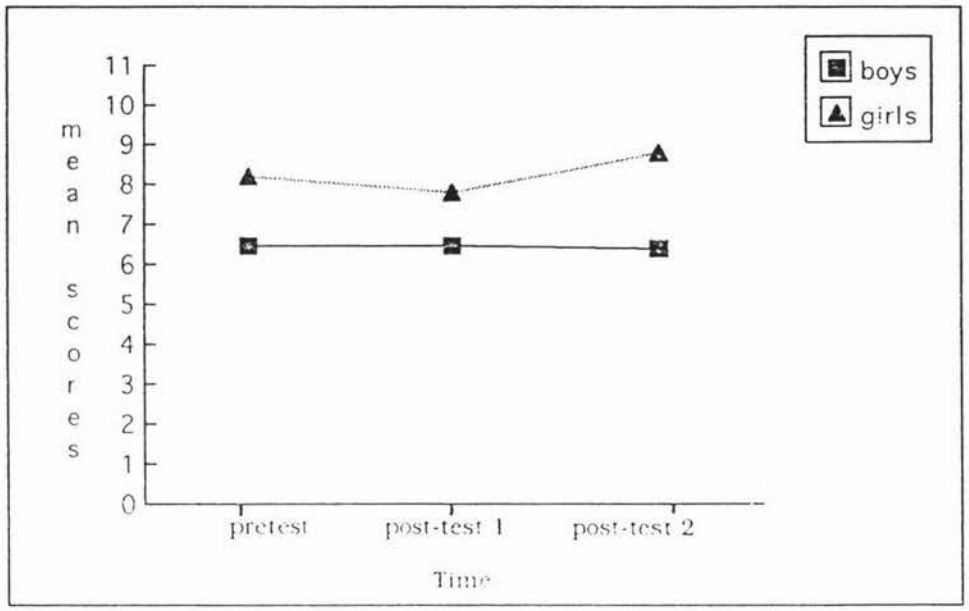

Figure 3: DSTP Kindergarten Subscale Mean scores by Gender

An interaction effect was obtained for the Peer subscale scores $F(1,18) = 5.05$, $p<.04$, as illustrated in Figure 4. The boys' mean scores dropped over time, whereas the girls' scores rose. There were no main effects for Time $F(1,18) = 0.80$, $p>.05$, or Gender $F(1,18) = 0.10$, $p>.05$.

A significant main effect for Time was found for the Physical subscale scores, $F(1,18) = 10.36$, $p< .01$. This effect is due to increased post-test scores for both groups (see Table 1). No Gender $F(1,18) = 1.92$, $p>.05$ or interaction $F(1,18) = 0.72$, $p>.05$ effects were obtained for the Physical subscale. Figure 5 illustrates the mean scores across time for the Physical subscale by Gender.

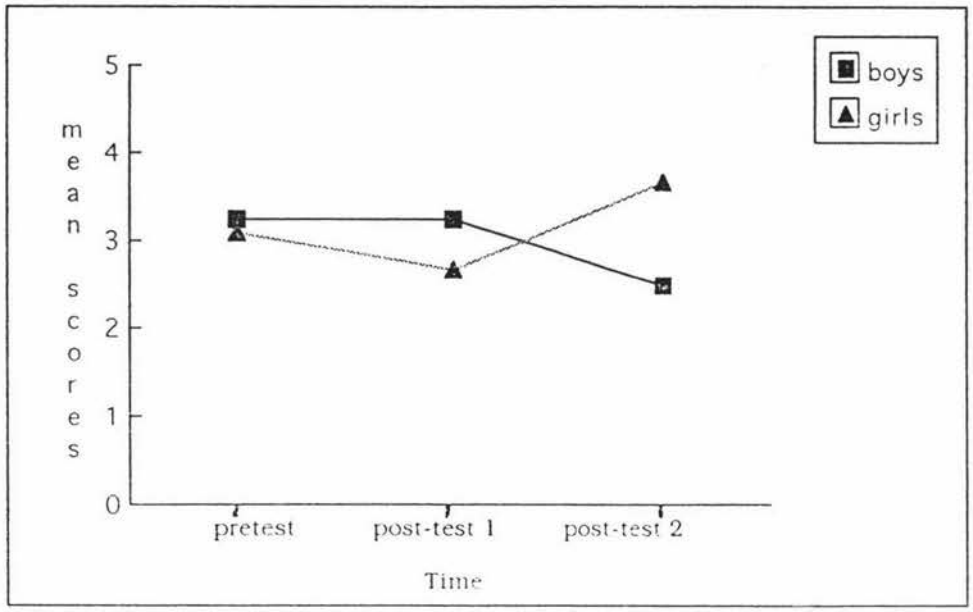

Figure 4: DSTP Peer Subscale Mean scores by Gender

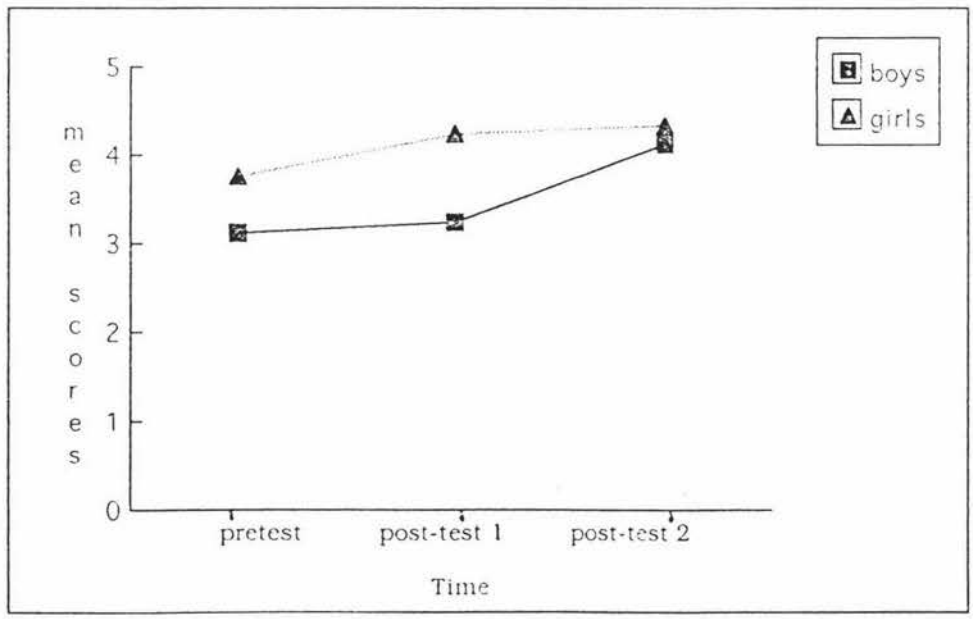

Figure 5: DSTP Physical Subscale Mean scores by Gender

DSTP scores as a function of ethnic background were also treated by means of the same ANOVA design. There were no significant main or interaction effects for ethnicity. Appendix E provides a summary of these results. DSTP Pre- and post- transition self-concept subscale scores by ethnicity are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: DSTP subscale scores pre- and post- transition as a function of ethnic background.

Subscales	Pre-Test		Post-Test 1		Post-Test 2	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Family						
Pakeha	4.92	0.90	4.92	1.08	4.67	1.23
Non-Pakeha	4.75	1.58	4.50	2.00	4.50	1.31
General						
Pakeha	4.25	0.97	4.58	0.51	4.58	0.79
Non-Pakeha	4.13	1.25	4.00	1.77	4.25	1.04
Kindergarten						
Pakeha	7.58	1.68	7.92	1.93	7.84	1.40
Non-Pakeha	7.38	2.00	6.25	1.04	7.86	1.96
Peer						
Pakeha	3.08	1.24	3.00	1.13	3.08	1.16
Non-Pakeha	3.25	1.49	2.75	1.28	3.38	1.19
Physical						
Pakeha	3.92	1.00	4.08	1.08	4.33	0.78
Non-Pakeha	2.88	1.13	3.88	0.99	4.13	0.83

Pakeha n = 12

Non-Pakeha n = 8

DISCUSSION

The gender effect found within the Family subscale may be due to gender stereotyping. It could be argued that girls have been socialised to value and demonstrate the bond with their families more strongly than boys. Indeed, females rate 'being loved by their family' more highly than their male peers, who value 'intelligence' more highly (Hattie, 1992). In a related study, Berenson, Morash and Petrakos (1998) examined gender differences in emotional closeness between preschoolers and their mothers. Girls were physically closer and engaged in more mutual eye contact with their mothers than boys. It is not unreasonable to assume that these experiences impact on family self-concept.

The finding that girls scored higher than boys on the General self-concept subscale runs counter to much of the literature reviewed (e.g., Marsh, 1989, 1990). Hattie's (1992) meta-analysis of over 600 studies found the difference, favouring males, on General self-concept was systematic across many studies. Examination of the raw data in the present study reveals General subscale scores achieved by two of the male participants were considerably lower than those obtained by the rest of the group. These low scores, coupled with the small sample size, may well have skewed results in favour of the girls.

An alternative explanation relates to the contention that preschool children are unable to make generalised

judgements about their worth. Harter (1984) claims that "the very concept of 'personess' is not yet firmly established among younger children, nor is the notion that the self ... can be evaluated as a global entity" (p. 1970). More recently, however, support has been found for the inclusion of a General subscale with young children (Marsh, Craven & Debus 1991). This finding is consistent with the 'all or none' thinking of preschoolers. Whilst it is possible that children are incapable of systematically integrating the various components of their self-concept, this may not be the manner in which they develop a general sense of self.

The eagerness-to-please of the young participants may also have had an effect on the scores. Of particular interest to the researcher was the almost unanimously positive response to item G2:

I am a good boy/girl

I am a naughty boy/girl

Only four boys replied in the negative eight times in total. Not surprisingly, these were amongst the four lowest scoring participants in this subscale (and others). Another very highly scored item was G1:

I don't really like myself

I really like myself

which elicited only three singular negative responses from three individuals, again males. Interestingly, only one child responded negatively to both G1 and G2 on the same

occasion. This is a vivid illustration of Harter's (1983) assertion that young children can hold opposing self-perceptions simultaneously with little concern at the apparent contradiction of logic. A similar developmental phenomenon has been noted regarding the reading self-concept of young school-age children (Chapman & Tunmer,1995).

In contrast to the sex effect for the General subscale, the third gender effect is in agreement with much of the current self-concept literature, and was anticipated. Kindergarten subscale scores were consistently higher for the girls than the boys on all testing occasions. This is not surprising, given that many of the items within this subscale directly relate to pre-academic skills - the developmental equivalent of those tasks within a school setting at which girls excel. Kindergarten teachers will (unhappily) attest to the effects of gender stereotyping which sees many girls spending their time indoors drawing, cutting, pasting and creating, whilst boys are outside climbing, building, and digging. It is therefore reasonable to assume that girls would feel more confident in their abilities in these areas than boys. Research with older children regarding academic self-concept (e.g., Marsh, 1989) certainly bears out this assumption.

The interaction effect found within the Peer subscale is somewhat puzzling. Whilst the girls' mean scores support the hypothesis of an initial drop followed by an overall gain in self-concept, the boys' results are a mirror image, culminating

in a lower score after a settled period of morning attendance. One possible explanation is that the boys found it more difficult than the girls to develop new relationships when removed from their familiar peer group into a session where children have already established their circle of friends. This theory is supported by Hartup's (1983) observation that boys tend to form group bonds, whilst girls develop personal relationships more readily.

The final finding in the present study relates to the Physical subscale, which assesses children's self-perceptions regarding their physical appearance and ability. Mean scores for both groups show a steady increase in test scores across time for this subscale. This may be due to a maturation effect, with children feeling more confident about their abilities as time goes on. Preschoolers make substantial advances in motor development between the ages of four and five, due to increasing body awareness, development of bilateral coordination and many opportunities to practise new skills (Harris & Liebert, 1992). It is not surprising, therefore, that items relating to children's perceptions of their running, jumping and climbing abilities reflect an increase over time.

Strangely, no gender effect was evident in the Physical subscale, even though self-concept research is quite unequivocal in its findings that boys hold more positive self-perceptions in the physical domain than girls (e.g. Marsh, 1989, 1990). It is possible that the inclusion of two physical

appearance items within the subscale obscured these gender differences. It might be expected that girls would score more highly on appearance items, thus 'balancing out' the edge achieved by the boys on physical ability items. Marsh (1990) found support for this assertion with preadolescents, stating that "at the very youngest ages girls have more positive self-concepts of Appearance..." (p. 103). A subsequent study with 5 year old children confirmed these findings (Marsh, Craven & Debus, 1991).

Although the quantitative findings of the present study were somewhat divergent, other aspects of the research are consistent with the literature on the self-concepts of very young children. Qualitative data were collected simultaneously when administering the DSTP. Verbal responses volunteered by the children were noted by the interviewer in addition to scoring the test items. Almost all of these responses expanded upon, qualified or illustrated those within the test. For example, upon answering negatively to item P1

Other kids like me

Other kids don't like me very much

one child added "They think I'm ugly". On a more positive note, another child indicated that she liked herself (G1), then stated "I like my voice and I like my name" by way of explanation.

These frank disclosures were also encountered by Harter

and Pike (1984) during administration of their non-verbal measure. Many children spontaneously elaborated on their responses to the test items, indicating that they have specific reasons for their judgements.

Qualitative data for the present study were consistent with gender stereotypes. Girls freely expressed their reservations regarding tasks perceived as physically challenging or dangerous ("I don't want to climb high in case I fall"; "I need a grown-up to help me [to use a stapler] or I . might hurt myself"). On the other hand, girls also qualified positive feelings about themselves in terms of physical features ("I'm pretty"; "I've got a pretty dress on").

In contrast, when boys answered positively to an item relating to physical ability, they expanded upon the wording, adding superlatives ("I can climb very,very high!!"; "I can run really fast! Zoomm!"). Elaborations on negative responses by boys related to either physical appearance, as mentioned earlier, or kindergarten related items ("I only do scribbles here - I can't draw"; "I can't do any puzzles - Mum has to help me").

Recommendations for Future Research

The Dimensional Self-Perception Test for Preschoolers would benefit greatly from further testing. Particular attention should be given to working with larger samples. A close examination of item and subscale composition for any inherent gender bias is also recommended. Statistically

significant results gained in the present study were contrary to the hypothesis that transition would cause a brief drop in at least some aspects of self-perception, followed by a greater gain after the sense of disequilibrium had passed. However, much of the data showed weak trends in this direction. Further testing with a larger number of children may see these trends strengthen to significant proportions.

Results from the present study concur with the findings of Harter and Pike (1984) that the self evaluations of young children tend to be skewed towards the positive. Although much of the recent research with preschoolers has been concerned with moderating these tendencies via specially designed instruments, it is unlikely that they can be totally diminished. A more comprehensive approach to research involving a variety of self-report measures coupled with observational data may help to provide a more balanced picture of the self-views of young children and how they see themselves fitting into the world. Anecdotal evidence from the primary adults within the children's environment would also contribute to this end.

CONCLUSION

A key result of the present study has been to add weight to the argument that the self-concepts of young children are more differentiated than once thought (see Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Eccles, Wigfield, Harold & Blumenfeld, 1993; Marsh, Craven & Debus, 1991). Marsh, Craven and Debus' work supports the use of an eight-factor self-concept model with children as young as five. The range of subscale scores obtained with even younger children make the present study successful in this respect.

Little or no empirical attention has been paid to the effects of the 'first promotion' on kindergarten children in the past. The limited statistical findings of the present study have contributed to this pool of research knowledge, and are indicative of possible effects in New Zealand kindergartens. It is possible that preschool children may not be as affected by the 'first promotion' as originally posited. Although the anecdotal evidence leading to the formulation of the hypothesis suggested that some children experience difficulty at transition, these children may be a very small percentage of the preschool population. The vast majority of children may register only slight changes in their self-perceptions after transition, being more adaptable and less concerned with social comparison than older children. Harter and Pike (1984) found such comparison was not consistently employed across all domains.

It is also likely that the kindergarten staff are successfully moderating the influence of the transition from afternoon to morning sessions for the majority of children and their families. Daniel (1993) likens the transition process to mountain climbing. The teacher plays the role of expert climber, facilitating the novice's ascent. "The beginner's movements are tenuous and faltering at first. There are missteps and slips; it is scary. The presence of the expert, the person who has experience and knowledge, is comforting." (p.17). A great number of 'casualties' during transition may be averted due to the awareness of highly skilled teachers.

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Appendix A

Hello, my name is Kelly White. I am a kindergarten teacher currently finishing a masterate degree through Massey University under the supervision of Dr James Chapman. This year I am planning to carry out some research at this kindergarten involving children 'moving up' from the afternoon sessions to the mornings. This may or may not include your child, depending on when this study is carried out. However, I would like to tell you a bit about what will happen, so you can decide whether or not to let him/her participate if necessary.

I am interested in finding out how children may be affected by this change of session. Therefore, each child 'moving up' within a 6 month period would be 'tested' three different times. This would involve the child in a short, 'fun' game with puppets and me, in the office, during the session. The door will be kept open at all times. The children do not have to come with me if they don't want to, and I will give them that choice each time. All information will be kept private and confidential - no names will be used in my final report at all. I will share only the general findings of the study at the end with all those involved or interested.

Before I begin this research, I must gain your permission as parents/caregivers on behalf of your child. However, if you do not wish your child to take part in this study, I will simply not call upon your child, and no-one else will know. It is your choice. You can talk to [names of staff] to find out more details if you wish, or they can give you my contact phone number and I will be happy to talk with you at any time during the research, if you have questions.
I will be at the kindergarten this Thursday, the 4th of May, to answer any questions. If you wish to allow your child to participate, please fill in and sign a permission form available from me on that day, or ask [names of staff] for one.
Thank you.
K.D. White (Mrs)

Appendix B

Consent Form

The first Promotion: Self-Concept and the Transition From Afternoon to Morning Sessions at Kindergarten

I have read the information sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I give permission for my child

_____ to be involved in this piece of research.

I understand that my child can also choose not to take part at any time.

I understand that all information regarding my child will be kept private and confidential, and that no names will be used in the final report.

Signed: _____
(Must be child's parent/caregiver)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Dimensional Self-perception test for Preschoolers

Instructions:
These two puppets are writing a story about children that go to kindergarten, just like you. They want to learn about you. They will tell you about themselves and then you tell them about yourself. Think very carefully about what you are ***really*** *like* ***now.*** *Say what is right* ***for you.***

Who lives in your house with you? [use child's answer to make questions appropriate]

PRACTISE ITEM 1	*PRACTISE ITEM 2*
I go to school	*I don't like icecream*
I don't go to school	*I like icecream*

Ph2	I can't climb very high **I can climb really high**
K1	I don't like kindergarten **I like kindergarten**
K9	I can't draw a person **I can draw a person**
Ph5	I am ugly **I am pretty/good looking**
F2	**My Mum/Dad smile at me a lot** My Mum/Dad growl at me a lot
G2	**I am a good boy/girl** I am a naughty boy/girl
K8	**I know the words of the songs we sing at kindergarten** I can't remember all the words of the songs we sing at kindergarten
Ph3	I don't play running, jumping games **I play running, jumping games**

P4 **I play with different friends each day**
I have a best friend that I play with a lot

F6 Mum and Dad don't put my paintings up
Mum and Dad put my paintings up on the wall

K5 I stay close to the teachers at kindergarten
I play away from the teachers at kindergarten

F4 **I have fun with my Mum/Dad**
I don't have much fun with Mum/Dad

P1 **Other kids like me**
Other kids don't like me very much

K4 **I make things inside at kindergarten**
I play outside at kindergarten

K7 I don't know what my name looks like when it's written down
I know what my name looks like when it's written down

G5 Other kids are more clever than me
I'm as clever as most other kids

P2 **It's easy for me to make new friends**
It takes a long time for me to make new friends

F5 **My Mum/Dad play games with me**
My Mum/Dad don't play games with me

K11 **I can use a stapler by myself**
I need help to use a stapler properly

G1 I don't really like myself
I really like myself

Ph1 **I can run very fast**
I can't run very fast at all

K2 **I can do really hard puzzles**
I can't do hard puzzles

F3 **My Mum/Dad take me to lots of different places**
My Mum /Dad don't take me to lots of different places

K10 **Other people can see what my drawings are about**
I have to tell other people what my drawings are about

P3 Other kids don't want to play with me
Other kids ask me to play with them

K3 **I sing songs with the other kids at mat-time**
I don't sing songs at mat-time unless the teachers make me

F1 **Mum/Dad read to me**
Mum/Dad don't read to me

G3 **I like doing new things**
I don't like doing new things

K6 I can't cut pictures out of old magazines
I can cut pictures out of old magazines with scissors

Ph4 **I like the way I look**
I don't like the way I look

G4 I can only do some things
I can do lots of things

P5 When I play games with other kids, they boss me around
When I play games with other kids, I'm the boss

Appendix D

SCORE SHEET

CHILD'S NAME _____ M/F ETHNICITY _____
AGE AT TRANSITION _____ DATE OF TRANSITION _____

ITEM CODE	T^1 (NOA-)____		T^2 (NOA+)____		T^3 (NOA+)___	
	+ve	-ve	+ve	-ve	+ve	-ve
Ph2						
K1						
K9						
Ph5						
F2						
G2						
K8						
Ph3						
P4						
F6						
K5						
F4						
P1						
K4						
K7						
G5						
P2						
F5						
K11						
G1						
Ph1						
K2						
F3						
K10						
P3						
K3						
F1						
G3						
K6						
Ph4						
G4						
P5						

	T^1	T^2	T^3
OVERALL TOTAL:			
FAMILY TOTAL:			
GENERAL TOTAL:			
PEER TOTAL:			
PHYSICAL TOTAL:			
KGTN TOTAL:			

Appendix E

Summary of Results of Statistical Analysis by Ethnic Background.

Family subscale: No Time $F(1,18) = 0.78$, $p>.05$, Ethnicity $F(1,18) = 0.12$, $p>.05$, or interaction $F(1,18) = 0.00$, $p>.05$ effects found.

General subscale: No Time $F(1,18) = 1.04$, $p>.05$, Ethnicity $F(1,18) = 0.34$, $p>.05$, or interaction $F(1,18) = 0.21$, $p>.05$ effects found.

Kindergarten subscale: No Time $F(1,18) = 1.85$, $p>.05$, Ethnicity $F(1,18) = 0.01$, $p>.05$, or interaction $F(1,18) = 0.21$, $p>.05$ effects found.

Peer subscale: No Time $F(1,18) = 0.04$, $p>.05$, Ethnicity $F(1,18) = 0.24$, $p>.05$, or interaction $F(1,18) = 0.04$, $p>.05$ effects found.

Physical subscale: Significant main effect for Time $F(1,18) = 13.03$, $p<.01$ found, as for gender data. No Ethnicity $F(1,18) = 3.05$, $p>.05$, or interaction $F(1,18) = 3.26$, $p>.05$ effects found.