

# Helping children transition from preschool to primary school in trinidad and toba...

[Education](#), [School](#)



Zack, a young boy four years of age came into a primary school in the North of Trinidad to be introduced to his new school. The Infants One teacher and the Vice Principal interacted with him. They were looking for different cues to show his readiness for entering the Infant One setting in September of 2018. He participated in a brief class session with the other students where they did English Language Arts, Mathematics and used playdough and puzzles. After the session, the Vice Principal had a separate discussion with his parents about what she noticed. She explained what markers an educator would be looking for to ascertain whether or not a child was ready for primary school.

Even though Zack knew one of the students in the class, he was still very reticent and wanted to stay with his mother. He was also unable to write his name when asked to do so nor was he able to write many of the numbers. When he was asked to write numbers from one to ten, he was unable to do so. Most of the time Zack showed no interest in any of the activities being done and he continually wanted his mother to be at his side. When the Vice Principal spoke to Zack's mother, she informed her that he did not show signs of being ready for primary school.

Transitioning is a part of daily life because it facilitates change. It is especially a key component in education as a child moves on from one level to the next (Qed. qld. gov. au, 2017). Human beings grow and develop in stages from the day they are born. In each stage of development, humans learn different skills. However, as they grow out of one stage and enter another, the skills previously learned are built upon. For example, a baby

first learns to roll over before he learns to sit up. The learning of these different skills come in stages as the baby grows and they flow into each other. We can say that there is a smooth transition from one stage to the next.

This research aims to investigate: how teachers of a private preschool in Morvant, Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), prepare their students for a smooth transition into Infants One of the primary school System in T&T. We investigated the expectancy of developed skills between the Early Childhood Care and Education (E. C. C. E) Curriculum and the Early primary school Curriculum.

**Our research questions were:**

Is there consistency and continuity between E. C. C. E and Infants One primary school expectations?

What are the main skills that pose an obstacle to the smooth transition?

How can we provide a preschool child with the required skills for the transition process to enter into primary school in Trinidad and Tobago?

We sought to understand what skills preschoolers are expected to attain prior to entering Infants One, as well as the methods used by teachers of the above mentioned private preschool, to equip their preschoolers for the transition into primary school.

Our research team consisted of six members which includes one private preschool owner/principal, one Infants One teacher, a former Standard One

teacher and three pre-service teachers. One of the pre-service teachers, Kachet Henry, has seven years experience in the education field, more specifically Science Education. The only practice she has had in a formal classroom setting was for her Teaching Practice in a private primary school in East T&T, which was a part of the University of New Brunswick's Bachelor in Education for Elementary Education Degree. Another of our preservice teachers, Nicole Jessemy, previously taught at a private preschool for one year in North T&T and she also assists with the Children's Ministry of her church. Colette Feracho is the Infants One teacher who has taught children of different age groups and abilities over the course of several years in both E. C. C. E and primary school Institutions. Renee Hendrickson has been in the field of education for the past nine years. She is also the owner of her own preschool and daycare centre for the past two years. Ayanna Dennis has no prior experience in the education field but she is a mother of an eight year old boy and as a parent she has experienced the transitioning phase on a personal level where she has worked with her son at home to ensure that he was comfortable enough to transition from preschool to primary school. Tahirah Khan-Ali, has previously taught the Standard One level for four years at a private primary school in St. Augustine.

The purpose of E. C. C. E Centres in T&T is to prepare children to enter into the primary school System. In T&T we have both private and public E. C. C. E Centres and they have different ways of preparing children for this transition from E. C. C. E to Primary Level Education. It should be noted that both types of Centres cater to the educational needs of children between the ages of

three to five years old. While there is a Curriculum Guide for E. C. C. E Centres which has been provided by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in T&T, this document is very broad. It is recommended that E. C. C. E teachers use this document to guide them in creating their syllabus thus consequently open to interpretation. As a result of this, the teaching that is done at the preschool level in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as learning can vary from school to school.

Mrs. Khan-Ali felt passionate about the topic due to an experience she had with her son and the E. C. C. E Centre he attended. He spent just one year at that Centre and although she knew he was not ready for primary school, the E. C. C. E Centre refused to let him continue another year considering that he was turning five years old that September. Her son was at a disadvantage from the first day of primary school. Each week she would receive a phone call from his teacher expressing that he had difficulties with adjusting to Infants One. The many complaints she received from the teacher, caused her to become frustrated, as well as question the abilities of her son. Other members of our group understood her experience and agreed to explore the disconnect between the preschool and primary school institutions in T&T. The experienced teachers in the group emphasised that they have also witnessed gaps between the E. C. C. E institutions and the primary schools in T&T. Additionally, the preschool in which we carried out our research, previously followed the E. C. C. E Curriculum Guide at face value.

One question that we were able to agree on was, “ do E. C. C. E teachers understand what is needed from them to help preschool students flourish

when they enter Infants One?" We therefore decided to conduct our action research based on that experience.

According to (UNICEF, 2012 p. 12) upon moving to a new school, children may find difficulty adjusting to changes in rules, routines, atmosphere, and teachers' expectations and interactions. Additionally, we are aware of accounts where children in T&T were enrolled in primary schools after leaving preschools and have found difficulty in settling down. An instance relayed by a School Social Worker, of a child who was of age to enter primary school, having spent two years in preschool spent the majority of the day out of class. From her observation, the Infants One teacher had become disenchanted with the idea of trying to get that one child to settle down and therefore allowed him to do as he pleased. After further inquiry, it was noted that in order for the teacher to deliver content to the remainder of the class, that one student had to be overlooked.

Children that enter primary schools in T&T have different levels of school readiness or preparedness. This can be due to the differences in the type of Early Childhood Centres they come from, whether it be an E. C. C. E Centre or private preschool. This is a problem because it creates an issue in teaching for the Infants One teacher. For example, if there are two students in an Infant One class and one meets all the expectations for further educational growth and the other does not, the teacher will now have to adjust her lesson for the latter student which may mean that the teacher has to reteach what should have been taught in preschool. This is also a problem for some students who do not lack the skills required. It can also prove

problematic for students who may not be able to adapt to their new environment and schedule. Students may even be frustrated about lacking the skills that their peers may have already mastered.

Children in their different stages of development, move from one educational setting to the next. There are different educational institutions that provide children with the foundation of the knowledge and skills needed in order to enter the primary school setting. This is offered by both public and private educational institutions for children of different ages. In T&T, below the age of five years old, there are daycares and preschools, between the ages of five to 12 years old, there are primary schools. Within each educational setting, there are certain expectations, requirements and outcomes that children must meet and achieve, to move from one level to the next. This research paper looks at the transitions from the E. C. C. E level to the primary school level of education in Trinidad and Tobago, within Port-of-Spain and environs.

This research was undertaken to discover why there is an issue with the transition of children from E. C. C. E level to Infants One level and what can be done on the part of preschool teachers to narrow the gap that exists. The reason for selecting the aforementioned topic is to understand the requirements of the E. C. C. E syllabus and how effective it is for entering primary school. According to UNICEF (2014) the early years of primary school [Infants One to Standard One] are considered Early Childhood Education. It is our belief that the pedagogical approach used at E. C. C. E Centres and the

Infant's level should have continuity in order to facilitate the seamless transition of students from E. C. C. E to Infants One.

In the framework of education in T&T, there are E. C. C. E, Primary Level, Secondary Level and Tertiary Level Education. This research investigates why the transition between the E. C. C. E and Infants one curriculum is not seamless.

In T&T, preschool or E. C. C. E refers to the informal or pre-primary education children below the age of five years old receive. These children are not required by law to attend school (Education Act. 2015, s. 76. 1, p. 51) however many children attend pre-schools throughout the country.

According to the T&T's MOE's website (2018), " There are presently one hundred and thirty-eight (138) fully operational Government and Government Assisted E. C. C. E Centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago, sixty-three (63) SERVOL managed Centres and six hundred and ninety-one (691) Privately run E. C. C. E Centres." The Ministry also states that a requirement for the registration of a preschool is that " Curriculum should be broad, balanced and coherent covering all the areas stated in The National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Guide" (2018). Curriculum " is a systematic and intended packaging of competencies (i. e. knowledge, skills and attitudes that are underpinned by values) that learners should acquire through organised learning experiences both in formal and non-formal settings" (Unesco. org, 2017). As we examined both the E. C. C. E and Infants One Curriculum, we noticed the various components that target both cognitive and behavioral outcomes.



According to the National E. C. C. E Curriculum Guide (2005), the guide to be used to assist with “ curriculum planning by teachers” (p. 15) as well as used to support the “ continuity...between E. C. C. E Centres and early years of primary school” (p. 15). The National E. C. C. E Curriculum Guide outlines five Strands - “ wellness, effective communication, citizenship, intellectual empowerment and aesthetic expression” (2005, p. 32)- and each suggests that the outcomes must be that children develop certain knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions. These categories of goals and learning outcomes are also stated in the primary school curriculum. However, unlike the primary school curriculum, which provides a detailed structure of content and learning outcomes, the National E. C. C. E Curriculum Guide simply outlines the goals. The skills that this research looked at were the children’s identification of colours, identifying numbers from one to ten and the ability to write their names.

In the Education Act ““ a compulsory school age” means any age between five and sixteen years’ (Education Act. 2015, s. 76. 1, p. 51). Infants start at age five where teachers focus on the nine subject areas: English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Spanish, Values Character, Citizenship and Ethics (V. C. C. E), Visual and Performing Arts (V. A. P. A), Agricultural Science and Physical Education.

For this research paper we focused on English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. ELA has 5 core areas (Fig. 1 p. 12 Ministry of Education Curriculum ELA Section) According to the Ministry’s Curriculum, Mathematics assist children in becoming critical, creative and strategic thinkers.

The main purpose of linking E. C. C. E and early primary education is to help provide a smooth transition for children from one level of learning to another. Since Infants One is the next stage after preschool, one of the important indicators of the quality of the curriculum is the continuity and transition from one level to the next (p. 66). The National E. C. C. E Curriculum Guide states “ building continuity from the E. C. C. E Centres to the primary school is an important aspect of the curriculum...as young children transition into new settings, they must have well-planned support.” (p. 66). Therefore, it is equally important to ensure that schools are ready for children. This is necessary in order to help to reduce failures in achievement and to help children adjust to the environment and demands of schools. The curricula must also be designed to stimulate children’s interest in learning, to prepare them for further stages in the educational process. There are particular skills which need to be mastered and should be done in accordance with the child’s mental and physical development (Scott and Fong, 2013). One of the approaches that can be helpful with assisting teachers at the E. C. C. E and primary levels in their duties, is by ensuring better understanding and cooperation in the achievement of their common goals.

Good E. C. C. E has strong, long lasting, positive effects on children’s development (Hendrick & Weismann, 2010). UNICEF asserts: “ Children often experience sharp differences when they transition from preschool to primary school, especially in relation to the structure of the setting and curriculum. In

early learning programmes, for example, children have the space to play; in primary school, they may sit behind desks” (Unicef. org 2012, p. 11).

The skills that children should develop before they enter Infants One is supposed to prepare them for a higher level of development, as they are the foundations to be built upon in Infants One. It is just as Scott and Fong (2013) say, “ tasks build on one another as they progress from the simple to the complex” (p. 462). If the outcomes stated in the Infants One Curriculum is a level higher than in the National E. C. C. E Curriculum Guide, there needs to be a seamless flow from one to the next. According to Deborah Khan (2016), the E. C. C. E program should enhance the transition process between preschool and the infant department. It is “ very significant” and “ sets the tone and direction in a child’s school career” so “ the adjustment to new circumstances is seen as critical to a successful transition” (Khan, 2016). The challenge takes place when a child transitions from a playful atmosphere in the preschool into a hectic atmosphere in the primary school where the very structure of their day and workload is drastically different to that which they have grown accustomed to.