# Home learning environment for young gifted children

Bernstein (1996) describes the way a child learns at home as having characteristics that will be particular to that child, the adults in their world and the opportunities for learning that are provided. He labels this particular approach to learning as a *home learning schema*.

A formal learning environment such as an early childhood program and an early years’ class will also have a learning schema (which Bernstein calls *formal learning/school learning schema* )which will involve characteristic expectations of information and skills suitable for that age group to learn, as well as learning strategies understood to be appropriate for that age group.

When children are familiar with a particular approach to learning and have acquired knowledge and skills that align with the learning expectations of the new learning environment the transition into the new setting is usually positive.

However, research has shown young gifted children are more likely to have acquired very different learning strategies and levels of knowledge — very different learning schemas — at home from that which is typical of an early childhood learning setting and school.

Some gifted children reorient very easily, but for others encountering a new learning schema can be very stressful, resulting in difficulty in adjusting and a lack of engagement with new learning. The higher the child’s level of giftedness the more difficult it can be for them to integrate into a new learning environment.

It is essential educators know the details of prior learning and the child’s learning schema, so they can accommodate and support the child’s learning expectations and experiences in the new setting.

In response educators should help children bridge the difference and learn a new approach to learning in the new setting.

For instance, it is common for a gifted child to have an intense learning relationship with an adult at home, who provides highly stimulating intellectual learning that they know this child can manage.

*Jasmine (age 4) and her mother played word games around finding words that sounded the same but had different meanings —a bow in her hair and a violin bow. Oscar (age 2) and his mother talked about the geometric properties of his construction set.*

In an early childhood setting the educator can model how to engage with learning activities or materials through sustained interactions. For an older child at school the teacher needs to explain clearly how work tasks are approached, what expectations the teacher has in terms of concentration, independence, work outcomes, etc.

Having intellectual ability several years in advance of one’s classmates does not automatically mean that the child also has an awareness or understanding of the culture of the new learning environment.

Bernstein, B. (1996) Pedagogy. Symbolic control and identity.