
Transitions as a Tool for Change: Briefing 2



Scottish Pedagogies of Educational Transitions
Transitions as a Tool for Change

Theme 1- Learning Journeys

The impact of early childhood transitions and the transitions ease, resilience and transitions capital acquired are often claimed to have an impact on subsequent transitions and later school success as a learner. Links between children's learning journeys and the transitions they make will be explored during this project. Key learning expectations framed by the different early childhood guidelines and their interpretation will be considered. In looking at what is meant by success, at how the various partners in early childhood transitions (including practitioners, children and families) view success, and at children's learning pathways, a focus will be taken on how success is measured and transitions are supported from infancy until the first year at school.

Children's experience in the early years is recognised by Scottish Government as central to their later success: policy stresses the role of good early years experience in combating poverty, promoting health, wellbeing and learning.

Early years transitions studies may be grouped broadly into three paradigms – those that focus mainly on the individual development and readiness of the child; those that, on the other hand, look more at the context (s), systems and structures to find answers to ease transitions and those that combine to consider development in context with a focus on the interpersonal and socio- cultural (Dunlop, 2009)¹.

This last perspective sees young children's transition as a process rather than an event (Peters, 2010a). Children are engaged in what might be called learning journeys (Peters, 2010)²: particular events may shape these journeys. The nature of children's learning and their involvement in it is rarely static, is influenced by parental and professional models of the child and pedagogical approaches differ from setting to setting: in capturing the day-to-day experiences of children we will be able to understand better what happens for them as they move on through early childhood provision and the impact of transitions on that process.

Researchers writing about transitions often use metaphors of journeys, bridges, landscapes and more to denote that there are often significant changes as small children experience transitions. An international Transitions Position Statement³ highlights four principles of effective transitions and implies a gulf between early childhood and school services. The principles are 'opportunities', 'aspirations', 'expectations' and 'entitlements'. Here we add 'participation'.

¹ Dunlop, A-W. (2009) Transitions Methodologies: Choices and Chances. Paper presented at SERA, November.

² Peters, S. (2010). *Literature review: Transition from early childhood education to school*. Report commissioned by the Ministry of Education. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

³ Educational Transitions and Change (ETC) Research Group. (2011). *Transition to school: Position statement* Albury-Wodonga: Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education, Charles Sturt University.

The focus of this seminar was to consider the transformative possibilities of cross-sector collaboration and the impact of this for children’s learning journeys through early childhood settings and into school.

‘Co-navigating and bridge building: educators collaborating to support children’s learning journeys’ Associate

Professor Sally Peters (*Head of School, Te Oranga School of Human Development and Movement Studies, University of Waikato, New Zealand.*) Using the analogy of co-navigating and bridge building, Sally Peters made clear that understanding and good communication between all participants either side of any childhood transition are essential if families, practitioners and children are going to be effective ‘co-navigators’. She extended the analogy by saying “Otherwise we may be offering different maps and could very well be heading in different directions”. Working closely with practitioners as co-researchers, she found a number of factors can influence the nature of such transitions – wider influences on early childhood provision and school priorities need to be acknowledged. Aligning curriculum on paper needs to be enacted in practice if children’s learning is to be supported. The social and cultural aspects of transitions were discussed: time to build connections is vital.

‘Rules, rules, rules and we’re not allowed to skip: Listening to the children’s voices about the transition to primary one’ Lynn McNair

(*Head of Cowgate Under-Fives Centre, Edinburgh.*) Lynn’s involvement in her centre’s community brings a powerful connection between practice and research. She illustrated the essential nature of listening to, and with, children: she referred to the ‘ethics of listening’ and being a ‘conversationalist’ as described by Dockett and Perry in our first event (Briefing 1). Lynn’s approach tapped into what children wanted to share: “some children drew pictures that they thought I would be interested in. Some children suggested giving me a tour of the school, I then approached other children to see if that would be something they would like to do.” Lynn drew out children’s fears, aspirations and hopes for the transition to school. Children also shared the knowledge they had about school and the knowledge they thought would be required. They knew some “have taes”: ‘You have to listen to the teacher – my daddy says so and you have to do what she says’. Lynn found that children experience much less agency in school.

Learning and Implications for Practice

- Transitions feature in a range of educational policies
- Sustained cross-sector collaborations create a climate for change
- Sustained relationships between home, ELC and school can be transformative for children
- ‘Curriculum-connect’ is important for learning journeys in a climate of different expectations
- Curriculum in action and in context makes sense
- As practitioners we need to explore how flexible or rigid we are in our approaches to transitions
- Listening to children as knowledgeable about their own lives
- Experience in early childhood is intensely social
- Self-assurance and enthusiasm for learning developed in the early years sets children up for later
- Initiatives to connect ELC and school more often come from ELC
- Variable use of transitions records
- How may young children’s agency be valued in school?