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# Transitions as a Tool for Change: Briefing 4

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Scottish Pedagogies of Educational Transitions  
Transitions as a Tool for Change

## Theme 3: Family Engagement

In Scotland there is widespread support for the strong political agenda focusing on providing for small children and their families and a will to influence children's longer term outcomes. There is much discussion of how to make this work. By starting early – with families pre-birth, our Government hopes to create change for children and families: the Early Years Framework (The Scottish Government, 2009) is supported by the policy to practice initiative 'Getting it right for every child' (Scottish Government, 2009). A Growing Up in Scotland<sup>1</sup> (2010) report proposes that skewed maternal-child attachment may affect the mother child relationship and their interactions – both in nature and quality. Experiences that support mothers at risk of mental health issues have the potential to have an impact on their children's development and well-being. While a 2015 report focuses on tackling inequalities in the early years<sup>2</sup>.

Within the early years and beyond, times of educational transition have the potential to foster engagement with education and through this, lead to positive educational and social outcomes, promote the development of resilience among children and families, and ameliorate social, educational and economic disadvantage (Heckman, 2011<sup>3</sup>; Smart, Sanson, Baxter, Edwards & Hayes, 2008<sup>4</sup>; World Bank, 2011<sup>5</sup>, POET Project, 2012<sup>6</sup>). There is a positive focus on 'closing the gap'. In the case of children's learning outcomes, starting early must also mean starting appropriately. There is evidence to suggest that transitions may marginalize the already marginalized (Michel Vandenbroeck, 2015<sup>7</sup>).

This theme aimed to investigate the ways in which the transitions families and children go through in the first years of a child's life can foster parental engagement with their own and their child's education. The opportunity afforded by early childhood transitions to the whole family as they accompany their child's learning journeys was considered in terms of education as a process in life development. The possibilities of parental participation and support for themselves in an ongoing way beside their child were explored with a particular focus on timing in lives. In this strand the three lenses of education, social support and lifelong education were used to explore the impact of such parental engagement on children's lives. Family engagement supports parents, grandparents, carers and other family members to be an active part of their children's learning, as well as becoming learners themselves. Children need companionable and interested family partners in their learning and this can mean a professional shift in ELC and school education to understand parents as contributing participants rather than positioning them as a potential professional burden.

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<sup>1</sup> Growing up in Scotland (2010) April. Marryat, L and Martin, C. *Maternal mental health and its impact on child behaviour and development*. [<http://growingupinscotland.org.uk/publications>]

<sup>2</sup> Growing Up in Scotland (2015) *Tackling Inequalities in the Early Years: Key Messages from 10 years of the Growing Up in Scotland study*. [<http://growingupinscotland.org.uk/publications>]

<sup>3</sup> Heckman, J.J. (2011). The economics of inequality: The value of early childhood education. *American Educator*, 35 (1), 31-47.

<sup>4</sup> Smart, D., Sanson, A., Baxter, B., Edwards, B. & Hayes, A. (2008). *Home-to-school for financially disadvantaged children: Final report*. Sydney: The Smith Family/Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank (2011). *Why invest in ECD?* <http://web.worldbank.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Pedagogies of Educational Transitions: *A Marie Curie IRSES Research Staff Exchange Scheme 2013-2016*

<sup>7</sup> Vandenbroeck, M. (2015). Keynote Address. *Early Childhood, Socialization & Transitions Conference*, Paris, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2015.

**Professor Aline-Wendy Dunlop** introduced the day by reflecting on **Transitions as a Tool for Change – Building Momentum**. Anticipating the day’s programme she emphasised participation, reflecting on how parents and families may feel positioned by services and highlighting the importance of seeing early childhood transitions in a lifelong context that includes first becoming a parent or grandparent, navigating frequent change and the importance of building relationships with others populating the child’s world.

**Professor Sacha Powell** (Professor of Early Childhood Education and Care, Canterbury Christ Church University) in **‘Babyrooms: A family engagement focus’** focused on the ethic of care, reciprocity of relationships, complementary learning and caring and our funds of knowledge. She reflecting on reclaiming the words ‘love’ and ‘intimacy’ in practice and building confidence in talking and singing with babies. She warned against the commodification of services and brought a new depth of understanding of the very young child’s perspective and the difference adult carers’ responsiveness and positive confidence combined with an ethic of care can make to little children’s experience.

Sacha’s session was followed by another unique experience when the Parent Network Scotland Drama Group presented **“In our own words: A Parent’s Journey”**. This docu-drama highlighted the reality of parenting as experienced by the three actors themselves, and their own transitions to finding a network of other parents and being able to share the daily hassles, joys, stresses and isolation that can be the reality of being a parent. Each of the actors had trained in Parenting Matters and focus on sharing skills and tools around improving parent-child relationships. A dynamic **Fast and Furious** session allowed us to beat the clock and at the same time increase funds of knowledge about a wide range of approaches, priorities and ‘happenings’ in family engagement work in Scotland.

1. ‘Building Parenting Capacity’, Jackie Tolland (Parent Network Scotland)
2. ‘Childminders and Family Transitions’ Maggie Simpson & Professor Aline-Wendy Dunlop (Scottish Childminding Association & University of Strathclyde)
3. ‘Reflections on transitions for engaging families in education’ Carolyn MacLeod (ADES National Transitions Officer for Children and Young People of Armed Forces families in Scottish Schools)
4. ‘Reflections on Family Engagement, Policy & Practices’ Siân Neil, (Senior Education Officer, Children and Families, Education Scotland)
5. ‘The impact of Aspirations’ Anne O’Grady (Head Teacher – Chesters Nursery School)
6. ‘Engaging Fathers in Playful Interactions with their Children’ Early Years Scotland’s Supporting Young Children Affected by Imprisonment. Jean Carwood-Edwards (CEO Early Years Scotland)

The day concluded with a very full discussion between all participants: **Towards a Transitions Position Statement: Your Priorities for Transition – Policy, Research and Practices**, led by **Heather Douglas**, GCC & ADES

## **Learning and Implications for Practice**

- Parent to parent networking works
- A need to understand what works in engaging men and boys in learning
- The importance of the home learning environment
- Family based early learning and childcare supports children in transition
- Multiple transitions need new ways of working
- Impact of increased flexibility in early learning and childcare in delivering transition programmes
- Families build up strong relationships with nursery staff but feel they don’t get to know the P1 teacher properly before their child starts school.
- Relationships are key to transitions – it’s everybody’s job and we are all responsible for this.
- Parental participation in their child’s education influences child outcomes positively
- Transition does not equal 'preparing for the next step' - it's about learning, celebrating and sharing success
- Parents experiences of transition will be very different than what we expect of them to support their children with today
- Social and relational pedagogy should be embedded in transitions. Building relationships should be key.
- Give children and families a voice to co-construct transition practices with practitioners.
- Avoid ‘rushed’ transitions