

Transitions: Handbook for Key Workers in Early Year's Settings

Importance of understanding effective communication for young children's learning and development during transitions



(Source: The Nation, 2020)

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Introduction

“Starting school and moving into a new class is the process that millions of children go through worldwide every year and it is a period of time that is filled with a range of emotions for both the child and the parents or carers. ”

(Kirklees Council, no date)

Children will experience numerous transitions throughout their development, some of these significant events will be expected whereas others will not. Children respond to these events in different ways, depending on how they impact upon them. In all cases, children need support and care when facing these changes throughout their lives. Within Early Years Education, some of the transitional periods could be moving between settings and carers, shifting from baby room to toddler room, starting preschool daycare and moving to a new school. While these settings may be similar in educational ways, it is a complex alteration in their daily routine with new people to learn and trust (Clarke, 2020).

There are two themes when considering the best practice for children during transitions. Article 3 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC) states that all decisions and arrangements should emphasize the best interests of the child. And to form high quality partnerships and communication between providers when planning for the child.

Principles of Transitions

- Building positive relationships
- Family involvement
- Collaborative Work
- Building on positive experiences
- Managing change
- Finding coping mechanisms to meet children’s individual needs

(Gov, 2020)

Bandura's social learning theory (SLT) emphasizes the importance of observational learning, imitation, and modeling. According to Nabavi (2012) Bandura's theory is based on concept of learning from interactions with others. While working in the early years as a practitioner you should consider the SLT when interacting with children, for example using correct and age-appropriate language, as the professionalism you carry will have a positive effect on the children and colleagues you work with. Whereas Bronfenbrenner recognizes that the outcome of a child's ability to become a successful learner depends on the environment around them. It is important for these environments to be engaging and exciting giving the child lots of opportunity to learn and flourish.

Transition is a process that is molded by practitioners, peers, parents and carers, and other multiagency professionals involved of every child. It takes careful planning to ensure you are meeting the needs of the child and their family around them. A key factor that influences parents' choices about childcare is the quality of its workforce (Gov, 2015). Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological theory illustrates the value of working in partnership with the people surrounding a child in order to support the child during transitions. The model demonstrates the range of transitions a child confronts day-to-day between experiences and the environment (The Open University, 2019, p.10) Effective communication between all parties involved in the child's life is crucial. In order for the child to generate positive physical, emotional, personal and psychological development, it is your responsibility as a practitioner, to ensure there is a working partnership between child, family and professionals.

The Role of the Adult

Practitioners have a duty of care for young children within an early year setting. Building positive relationships with children has a significant impact on their physical, intellectual, emotional and social development during transitions. In order for practitioners to provide effective education, they must understand the variation of rate in which children develop in the early years, and create an effective, personalized provision that will support the child and encourage them to engage and overcome barriers that may occur (Welsh government, 2015).

Early Years Matter (2020) asserts the importance of observation. Watching and listening to the children is how practitioners obtain vital information about the child that will support practitioners document behaviors, tendencies and patterns of learning. Martin (2017) indicates the work of Piage, and how observations are valuable when creating provisions and building positive relationships with the children because it gives the key worker an insight into the children's learning. Vygotsky theory was similar in the sense that the observations were constructive. However, he specified instructional implications must be prospective and aimed at the individual's proximal level of development, "the upper threshold of instruction" (Shabani, Khatib and Ebadi, 2010, p.244). The observation theories of Piage and Vygotsky support key workers to learn each child's distinctive personality and identify individual needs, and in turn can plan appropriately to meet the needs of each individual and support them during their transition into school in the early years.

Every child is unique, and at times of significant change children can feel vulnerable, particularly those with additional needs. To encourage children to feel secure when settling in to new environments with ease, it is important to plan with appropriate and flexible preparation and understanding, for children to experience positive transitions.

Routine gives children a sense of security, makes them feel safe and looked after. It is the responsibility of the keyworkers in the setting to provide consistency of good practice for all children, effective communication with parents as primary caregivers have a significant extent

of knowledge that professionals can stimulate when supporting children (Oxfordshire County Council, 2017).

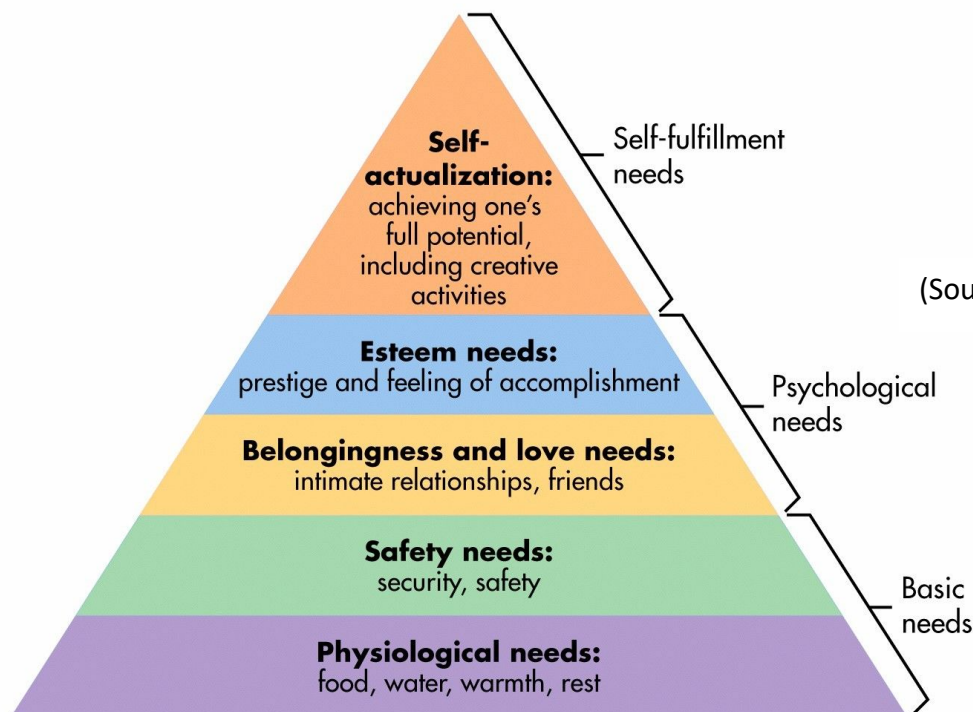
Children with poor social skills are likely to experience rejection by their peers, which may limit their access to social learning opportunities. For example, a child from a deprived or unstable homelife may form an attachment to you as their key worker, as a caregiver for them. Key persons have a significant influence upon the emotional development of children, it is important that they establish a positive bond with the child, encouraging them to feel respected and valued for a healthy development. Practitioners should also consider strategies for facilitating social development (Watson, 2018). In the early years, these collaborations can be enriched by the child partaking in experiences through play.

The Needs of the Child

It is important as practitioners in the early years settings to have an understanding of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. His theory is a five-tier model of human needs split up into categories; basic need (including physiological needs) and growth needs. Children will seek for these lower needs to be satisfied, for example water, food and oxygen (outdoors) before being able to develop through the growth needs as they progress towards self-fulfillment.

Practitioners should consider these needs when supporting the children during their growth and development, in order for them to reach self-actualization and achieve their full potential.

(Yahaya, 2014)



(Source: Pinterest, no date)

Environment

According to Welsh Government (2015) Every child is unique and it is essential that children are provided with a variety of different learning tools and opportunities, in order for them to develop at their individual pace.

The Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Phase (EYFS) (2012) aims to produce equality of opportunity in line with anti-discriminatory practice for all children which in turn supports the value and respect of each child as individuals. A secure foundation of high quality and consistent opportunities that are planned around the needs of each child. Montessori child-centered practice combined with enabling environments, offers a variety of resources and activities relevant to children's cultures and unique characteristics, supporting individual needs of children in effort to develop their learning (EYFP, 2012). As practitioners, it is useful to understand and utilize Montessori's practical methods and the motive behind them when planning activities. Such as, the real-life materials and equipment being accessible within the classroom at all times giving children the responsibility to look after the equipment which supports self-regulation (Montessori Schools Associate, 2012).

In respect of Maslow's theory in the early years with young children, oxygen is one of the basic needs for children, there are many ways in which you can utilize this environment for children. Fredrick Froebel's approach to learning was through play focusing on the outdoors, he recognized the benefits children receive from unstructured play with nature and use of loose resources to enrich children's imagination and have gain positive experiences with the outdoors. This opportunity enhances a child's physical and cognitive abilities during their personal development (Knight, 2009).

Positive Relationships

It is key for practitioners to establish positive relationships with new children transitioning into schools in the early years. Children often display signs of insecurity during this significant event in their lives and it is critical for them to feel safe. Considering Maslow's hierarchy of needs, children seek for the sense of love and belongingness. Entering into a new environment during this transition into school, children need security and their physiological well-being satisfied, for them to be able to move through the hierarchy of needs reaching a point of comfort enabling them to explore curiosity, discover new information and progress their cognitive development. (Yahaya, 2014)

Bowlby's theory of attachment, in contrast with Maslow's theory, was influenced by the study of two newborn monkeys' relationship with their mother, conducted by Harlow & Zimmerman in 1959. The monkeys were separated from their mother and put into cages with 'surrogate mothers' where one was made of wire in a bottle and the other covered in cloth. The monkeys appeared to favor the cloth, indicating attachment is an intrinsic need for an emotional bond and demonstrating the importance of positive relationships.

Children that have a secure attachment between themselves and their primary care giver, are more likely to develop attachments with their key workers. These relationships will allow them to feel comfortable and safe, therefore becoming eager to explore their surroundings. (Learning Theories, 2016) Children should be made to feel welcomed and cared for when entering a new setting, practitioners recognize the importance of giving children consideration during transitions as it is vital to understand the process. This allows the children and their families to have a smooth transition experience.

Partnerships

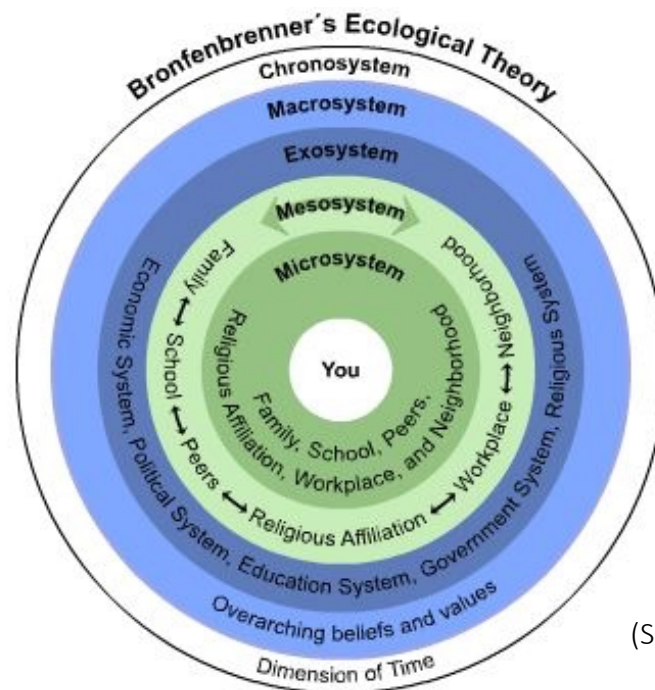
" A process that involves sharing information and skills and building relationships based on mutual respect and trust" (Early Years Matters, 2020).

During the transition process it is imperative for keyworkers to have fundamental information about the children they will be working with, particularly children with additional needs and young children in the early years. Looking at the process of young babies and toddlers joining preschool, there is a lot of information you will need to gain about the child. 'What would you like them to learn?' is an example of an open question you could ask the parents of a child, that gives them the opportunity to share their anxieties with you in a discreet manner. This kind of first-hand interaction is key when forming relationships with parents (Stinton, 2018).

It is important for keyworkers to support the child's family and to alleviate parents' anxieties through demonstrating good practice. Devising an effective partnership with parents prior to the child's arrival in the setting through registration meetings, informative open days and keeping daily logbooks, maintaining a continuity of care is vital for families during the transition of their child settling in to school in the early years, more so for the children and families that require additional support (Department of Education, 2020). It is the responsibility of the key worker to construct a team of support around the family catering for the child and their needs, considering the needs of their family providing additional support from multi-agency professionals.



Shared communication between partners and the efforts of adults and peers are found to be just as important as real-life, everyday experiences. Teachers also play a critical role in facilitating inclusion, looking at the importance of supporting pre-service early years teachers and gaining knowledge of the child. (Cologon and Zmecawalla, 2018).



(Source: Googlesites, no date)

Anderson, Boyle and Deppeler (no date) state that Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework is the developmental processes on experiences through the course of their life that he believes to shape and stimulate the child's development.

Argueta (2018) indicates that Bronfenbrenner's theory helps us to think about the different types of factors that influence children's development and behavior. Immediate environments, relationships between family and school, exosystem, culture and social context of the country's political climate, and when an event occurs in a person's life. Working in partnership with parents during the transition into first years of school can provide a brief understand of each child and give key workers an expectation of how the child behave.

Interventions

"Playing is learning, doing is learning. That the golden rule in early education." (Edx Education, 2019)

The Foundation phase framework encompasses holistic development of children, building on their learning experiences and knowledge. Research show children in the early years learn best through experimental activities or 'play'. Unstructured free play within the setting and outdoor environments, with peers and keyworkers supports the children engagement in activities. Play, work and learning are all combined and developed through the children's play for young children in the early years (Welsh Government, 2015).

Children play and explore from concrete, fun and structured materials that progress their motor skills as they gather information through senses. Montessori materials are child life-sized tools, designed to enhance a child's senses, providing them with repetitive opportunities to discover independent learning during their practice. Children build concepts and ideas, and then interoperate the information they have obtained and organize them into categories to make meaning of them. Optimal learning happens when children feel positive. They associate play with pleasure, nurturing these positive feelings and in turn, developing confidence and effective communication, and creative skills (Edx Education, 2019).

When children are feeling vulnerable during transitions or a significant change, play can be used by practitioners to communicate with the young children. It gives them a sense of enjoyment which will in turn, allow them to open up and feel settled within a new setting.

Integrated work involves the role of professionals and key workers facilitating joint assessment, planning and review processes. It includes the young person and their family working together efficiently to meet the needs and to improve their lives, following the government policies. Key workers and multiagency, work proactively together to devise a plan coherently, ensuring the child and family are receiving the appropriate support to enable the best possible outcomes of the child (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010).

Proposed Outcomes

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child UNCRC (Welsh Government, 2015) all children have the right to an education without discrimination of their ethnicity, family background, sex, religion, abilities. Key workers within education must encourage every child's personality and talents, and strive to advance their abilities during their development within education. It is important for the child and their family to feel supported, valued and respected by all professionals involved during their growth (Slideshare, 2015).

Purdon (2014) identifies Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) as contributing to good progress and outcomes by children. The interaction of problem-solving during play or activities during the transition into the first years of school for young children, is a gateway for key workers to communicate with the young people, and a stepping stone for building relationships with them. SST incorporates the seven learning areas within the early years' framework. SST also links with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, where the children's thoughts can be explored deeper with the aid of a practitioner to guide them. (Shabani, Khatib and Ebadi, 2010, p.244).

It is momentous that children are provided with opportunity and essential resources needed for them to grow and flourish through their development to reach their individual self-actualization.

The curriculum in Wales was assessed by Professor Graham Donaldson. His report asserts that holistic learning through play is more effective on children's learning and development in the early years, and that there is a higher sense of general enthusiasm and engagement for education from the children, which in turn will enhance their learning. Donaldson emphasizes on particular key points such as:

- Ensuring schools meet the learning needs of all their students
- Building professional capital and collective responsibility throughout the system
- Developing a coherent assessment and evaluation framework to promote improvement

(Donaldson, 2015)

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