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Transitions and how Practitioners can Support Children

West Barns Primary School. (no date)

The importance of effective communication

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Introduction

This handbook is intended for those who work within the early year's sector on how to support the rising 3's who are transitioning from Flying Start to Nursery. The purpose of this handbook is to provide practitioners with information about this particular transition within the child's life, the effects on the child's development and how they can support them through this with effective communication and partnerships. The aim of this handbook is to facilitate practitioners with the understanding of what transitions mean, how they can support this transitional stage, the effect on the children's holistic needs, how they, as practitioners, can make sure they are meeting the child's individual needs and rights, as well as how to communicatively effectively during these transitions with the children and their parents/carers and other multiagency professionals.

During this transition stage, practitioners must keep in mind the child's right (article 12) to have a voice and express an opinion on matters that affect them and have their views taken seriously, we must also not forget that the child's age and developmental maturity in to account when communicating about the transition to Nursery, (Trodd, L. 2013 p. 15). This handbook will also look at the proposed outcomes that practitioners, would like to achieve from effective communication and positive relationships through partnerships, with the idea to improve the quality of care, communication and working together during children's transitions from Flying Start to Nursery.

Transitions and communications

Transitions are stages in life, where children will move through different milestones such as going to school/playgroup or going through changes at home for example moving house or welcoming a new baby. Transitions could also be as simple as going from the house to the car then on to school/park/friend's house. It is important that practitioners are able to support children through this transitional stage from Flying Start to nursery school along with supporting their parents/carers as this transition can be an emotional time for children and their parents/carers.

Early Years Matters (EYM), (no date), mentions that transition are not one single event that will just happen and is an opportunity for growth and different learning opportunities for children, this can be exciting for children but also an uncertain time due to

different surroundings, expectations and procedures, EYM, (no date), states that **"Transition has been described as an ongoing journey rather than a destination".** This is further supported by Brooker, L. (2008, p. 5), who mentions that Fabian and Dunlop (2002) and Pentriswsky *et al* (2005), both describe transitions as an ongoing change, process and adaptation of going from one setting to another setting, such as going from a Flying Start setting to nursery school. During this transition stage it is important that we are able to communicate effectively, practitioners can do this by developing: -

- Proficient listening skills
- Being able to communicate with others as equals
- Having a supportive approach without becoming interfering
- Avoiding any subtle negative messages
- Having the ability to adapt their communication skills to different people and situations

(Ward, 2010, p. 27-28)

The needs of the child

During the transitions period between Flying Start and Nursery, practitioners must make sure that they are able to meet the needs of the children and ensure that they are recognising the children's rights (within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)) to have a voice and be taken seriously (Article 12) and as well as Article 13 the freedom expression, being able to have access to information (within the law) and be able to express their thoughts and feelings (UNCRC_summary-1_1.pdf (unicef.org.uk), no date). Practitioners must also keep in mind the UNCRC's articles 28 and 29 which state that children have the right to education and the goals of education.

During the transition stage practitioners must keep these rights in mind, they are also supported by Johann Pestalozzi, who states that children have an equal right to education and should be able to have the scope to be able to gain from it. Pestalozzi also states that traditional education and learning had little concern about children's interest and experiences and that it was tedious, he contemplated that children's natural capabilities should be fostered organically through nature and encouraged to examine and explore solid and physical objects.

Pound, L. (2005, p. 9) mentions that Pestalozzi stated that **"Progress from the familiar to the new should be in a loving and secure environment".** He mentions that security in the home helps to give children the origin of their reality and is the foundation of children's learning and that providing children with social interaction, love and work can form the basis of children's development (Pound, L. 2005, p.9). Similarly, Abraham Maslow (1943) developed a hierarchy of needs (see image below): -

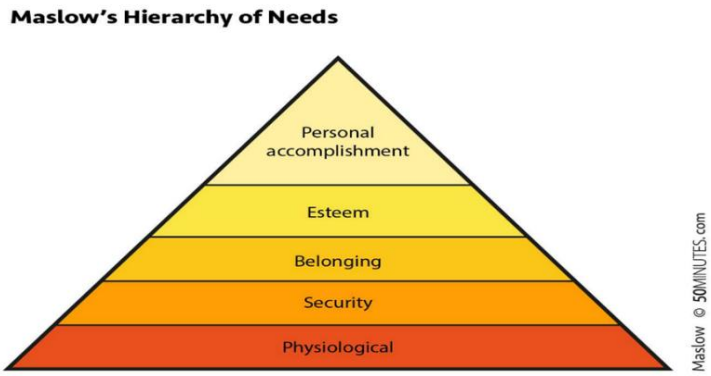


Image from Pichère, P. and Cadiat, A.-C.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. 2015 p. 5

Maslow has five stages of hierarchy, the first being Physiological, in simple terms this level is where children's basic needs and functions relating to personal survival, these are needs such as eating, drinking, breathing, personal care, to name a few. These are vital needs and form the basis of children's individual needs and can surpass the need for things like security and esteem. The next step is security, this does not just relate to physical integrity but this isn't the only category that security can apply to, it can also relate to things like protection against theft and damage, children will need their needs of love, social and affection (similar to Pestalozzi) are met as well as having a sense of security to have a need to belonging, this like Pestalozzi, Maslow mentions that this is where practitioners and parents/carers will need to take the social nature of the human being.

These stages of Maslow's hierarchy of needs along with Pestalozzi's theory can relate to children during the transition period from Flying Start to Nursery, as the transition period can be a time of excitement and joy but can also be an anxious and uncertain time for children to go through. By ensuring that practitioners are able to develop strong and positive bonds with children through a keyworker system, whilst working with parents/carers and have the knowledge to meet the needs and rights of the child during this stage they can ensure that children feel a sense of belonging and safety throughout the transition and that their needs of love, affection and social interaction are being met. This

will promote positive interactions with children. When the children's basic needs, a sense of security and a sense of belonging have been meet children will be able to have the tools to move through the other stages of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The final stage is personal accomplishment, within Maslow's theory he mentions that the lower level needs will depend on the perception of others, this top need will be connected with how children will develop their individuality and personality.

According to Maslow, the needs that children will go through will depend on the individual wishes of the child and will take any form as long as they met the child's wishes, he touches on that the needs of each level will need to be satisfied before moving on the next, for example someone may lack the sense of belonging if they feel unsafe and uncertain during a transition stage. (Pichère, P. and Cadiat, A.-C. 2015 p. 5-6).

The role of the adult

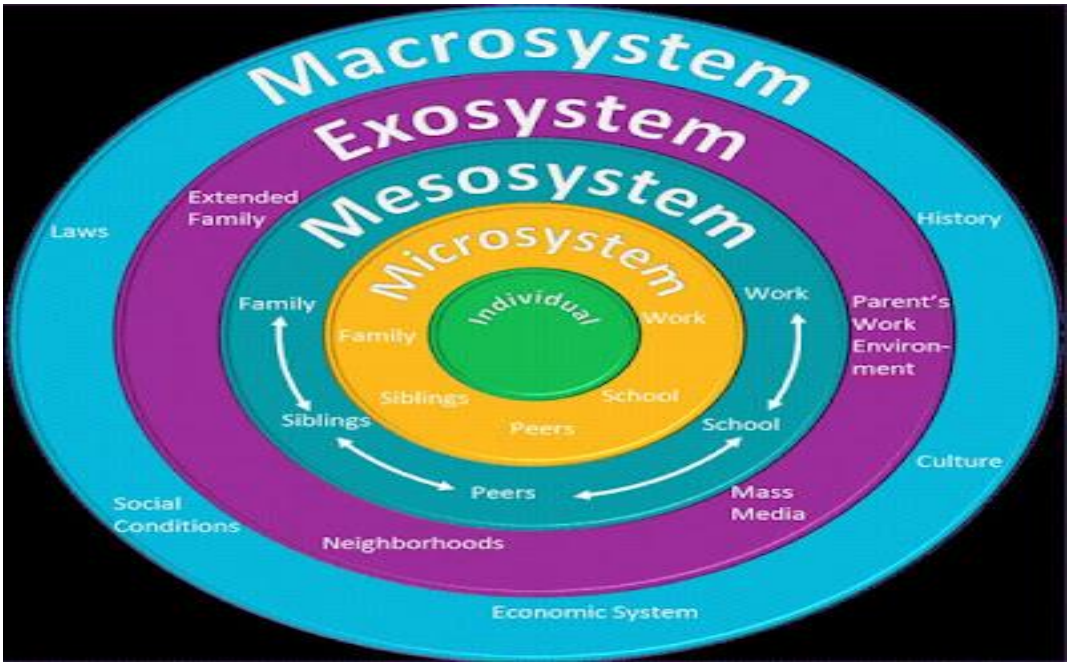
The role of the adult will be to develop a positive and knowledgeable relationship with children and their parents/carers. Children will be allocated a keyworker when they initially start at Flying Start, with the purpose to develop a secure and encouraging relationship to help the children transition in to the setting. This relationship will continue to grow and become stronger during their time at the Flying Start and will help support them during the transition in to nursery. These bonds will have formed over social interactions, observations, planning for the child's interest with their rights and needs kept at the forefront of practitioners minds.

Through the keyworker system, practitioners are able to support and monitor the initial transition to nursery, working with parents/carers and other team members. Keyworkers are able to hand over information through one page profiles, I am Threes, all about me forms, these will include information such as children's interest, practical needs, emotional/social support, any additional support with either general or additional needs. These will be completed with the children and their parents/carers. Practitioners can also support and help their key children get ready for the transition to their nursery school by talking about the visits, discussing teachers, that they are going to see what's available, where toilets and what they may need to wear and who they are going to school with. Staff will also need sufficient time to gather information about the child, such as if they are

vulnerable/additional learning needs and have the opportunity to liaise with other professionals whom may be involved. (Flying Start, May 2017, p. 36, 41, 47).

The keyworker system embraces the attachment theory; attachment theory originates form the theorist John Bowlby (1958). Bowlby began to observe children through an evolutionary point of view rather than a psychological viewpoint. Bowlby put forward that children, with their reliance on their mothers, will develop certain behaviours that will keep their mothers near them. This is similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs as Bowlby theorised that **"…these behaviours were essential to infants' survival…"** (Watson, M. 2018, p.15-40). In essence, Bowlby's attachment theory suggests that when a caregiver interacts with a child and supports their development and meets their needs, this becomes necessary to giving them a successful life. Being able to socialise through interactions, children are able to develop the skills they need to grow but also gives them a sense of self belief and a belief in those around them, Bowlby suggests that the way children develop progress is the result of children's nature and the caregivers (or mother's) behaviours.

In 1979, Urie Bronfenbrenner developed his theory on the ecology of human development, following five environmental stages that children will move through, as shown in the image below: -



Susan Marie, 2017

Within Bronfenbrenner's theory first environmental stage that is closest to the child, the Microsystem, consists of family, siblings, peers, school and work. The environments that will be most common for the child will be either the classroom or home, these will enable

children to have multiple interactions with not only family members but also friends/peers, community members such a neighbours, childcare practitioners and teachers. Within these first environmental stage children will develop an initial understanding of social interactions, rules and behaviours. Bronfenbrenner advocates that within the Mesosystem stage the regularity and quality of the relationships formed enriched children's development when strong links have helped form strong links from the Microsystem. Aubrey and Riley (2009, p. 154) mention that Bronfenbrenner later observed that **"… the individual as being key to how interactions within the environment influenced development."**.

When comparing Bronfenbrenner's theory to Bowlby's theory of attachment and the Keyworker System mentioned within Flying Start's Transition Annex, they are all quite similar in suggesting that having strong relationships with a key adult has a positive effect of children's holistic wellbeing and development and this can be beneficial for children during the transition stage from a Flying Start to Nursery, ensuring that the transition is communicated effectively to the child, parents/carers and other professionals involved and is as smooth as possible with the child's best interests at the centre.

Partnerships

Developing partnerships with parents/carers is not only beneficial for the child whilst at the setting but also valuable to the wider community. By developing a trusting relationship with parents/carers can help practitioners to provide opportunities for support and information, this could lead to more proactive and extensive support for the whole family. (Wilson, 2016, p. 16). This can start as the base for a solid partnership with the children's needs, rights and development at the forefront of transitioning from Flying Start to Nursery. Practitioners are able to work with other multi-agencies such as social services, speech and language, inclusion to help support children through the transition period working closely with parents/carers and children to provide as much information about the child to support them on their school journey. Wheeler and Connor (2009, p. 38) mention that's **"Davis, Day and Bidmead (2002) suggests a partnership model based on the Parent Adviser Approach"**. Some key elements of the partnership model are as follows: -

- Having open communication with all parties
- A common aim

- A mutual respect for all those involved
- Being able to work together

The Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) team holds the belief that the partnership model can be supportive for practitioners and parents/carers as it encourages greater involvement for parents/carers in their children's learning (Wheeler and Connor 2009).

The partnership model can also be applied to the child's transition to nursery school from Flying Start as it requires everyone to work together towards the common aim of helping the child transition smoothly from one setting to another. This also requires good communication skills during the whole process as parents/carers and the child will have developed a sense of trust with the key person and will likely feel confident that the practitioner will be able to communicate the child's needs and what support may be needed within the nursery setting. This may also involve working with other multi-agencies such as speech and language or inclusion who may have been working alongside the child, parent/carer and practitioner during the child's time at the Flying Start setting and will be able to communicate additional information that can support the child's holistic developmental needs along with an individual developmental plan or one-page profile (if there is any additional needs) if needed.

Lumsden (2014, p. 293), mentions that Harrison *et al* (2003) stated **"that there is no single, agreed definition…"**, it is also mentioned that the term partnership is sometimes interchanged with the term collaboration. They propose that some characteristics to keep in mind for successful partnership: -

- Having a common aim and acknowledging a shared vision for an agreed outcome
- Acknowledging and respecting others and their contributions to the partnership
- Being flexible to the needs of others for example different cultural needs or values that may arise during the partnership
- Have agreed communication systems and exchange information
- Establish the agreed communication systems between the relevant agencies
- Sharing any resources and/or skills

(Lumsden 2014, p. 293)

This is similar to the partnership model and highlights the importance of communication and having strategies to support children and their families through this transitional stage. Having these key ideas that are mentioned in the partnership model and by Lumsden (2014), and the basis of a trusting and strong relationship with the children and their families, practitioners are able to provide individualised and effective support to children during this stage and be able to implement various communication methods along with age appropriate support for the child.

Intervention

Within this section of the handbook, some methods and activities that will assist the transition period, that can help make it as successful as possible. Thus section will look at the communication of information between both settings and the families and any practical steps that can be taken.

The National Minimum Standards (NMS) takes about Standard One which concerns information about the childcare service and requires that parents/carers will be given all the information required, so that they can make an informed decision about the services they need within the childcare sector, this can help parents/carers and children through the transition period from Flying Start to Nursery as parents/carers can access information about the Nursery their child is transitioning to and are able to ensure the nursery is the right fit for their child but also enable parents/carers and practitioners to be able to communicate to the child about the routine, the staff and activities and resources of the nursery setting they will be attending. (Care Inspectorate Wales, April 2016, p. 14). These standards provide settings with guidance on the minimum standards that are required of the, setting are able to develop their own methods of these standards and inspire settings to develop best practice both nationally and internationally.

Foundation Phase and Flying Start are curriculum's in Wales that have been put on place for babies and children to have an opportunity to experience play opportunities through first hand experiences, the opportunity to develop through quality care and education and have an equal start in life. (Welsh Government, revised 2015). Some supportive interventions could be: -

- Facilitate opportunities for parents/carers with opportunities to ask questions and feel relaxed and confident to express any concerns that they might have regarding the transition.
- Communicate with parents/carers about visits to the nursery school that will provide children and parents/carers, providing the chance to meet the teachers and start to develop relationship with them, children should be provided with play opportunities to familiarise themselves with the areas of learning and activities for when they start.
- Provide children with the nursery routine at can be discussed at the Flying Start and at home to help provide familiarity to the setting
- Ensure that children have plenty of settling in time for example a minimum of two weeks to allow them to settle in the nursery routine before being left for the whole session

Proposed Outcomes

Ideally the preferred outcome during this transition is a child that is happy and confident, who is engaged in the process and is well prepared, both emotional and socially, to move through this transition to the next stage of their educational journey in addition to being able to trust those around them to support their individual needs.

How are practioners able to do this? Through observation and recording the child's achievements, facilitating staff with the opportunity to create a glimpse of how the child is developing, recording their interests, stage of learning and ideas. Frobel mentions that if an adult is good at observing children "**… and able to tune in to a child's biological and social, cultural and community needs will be powerful educators"** (Bruce, 2012, p. 158). The founder of Reggio Emilia approach, Loris Malaguzzi, promotes documentation of children's development through observations, enabling practioners to understand the child's individualised learning, observing and guiding their interests, providing child with opportunities to reflect on and understand their learning. (Thornton and Brunton, 2007, p. 70-71).

Observations help practioners to acknowledge and respond to children's developmental needs and provide next step opportunities, practioners are able to adapt to

the child's individual needs during the transition from Flying Start to Nursery as they have been able to develop a foundation of trust, care and familiarity and further solidified this through observations to meet interests and needs, enabling in them to communicate these to support the child and parents/carers during the transition and support the nursery staff to also support the child to the next stage of their educational journey. Having a holistic assessment of the child enables the child in the moment to make positive connections between home and the setting and facilitates planning for the next steps in their learning. Holistic assessment enables practioners to be able to help provide the child acquire the skills and confidence they will need to help them through subsequent transitions in life.

References