



Source: Easterside Academy, 2019

An Early Years Practitioners Handbook

A guide to effective communication resulting in positive transitions within early years settings



Source: Munson, 2022

Contents

Introduction – Page 3-4

The Needs of the Child – Page 5-7

The Role of the Adult – Page 8-10

Partnerships – Page 11-12

Interventions – Page 13

Proposed Outcomes – Page 14-15

Reference List – Page 16

Introduction

Aims and how to use this handbook

The guidance in this handbook includes many aspects that need to be taken into consideration when establishing successful transitions. These aspects are broken down into clear sections and explained thoroughly enabling the practitioner to have a broad understanding of the impact each one has on the transition. They can then apply the guidance effectively in practice. Some of the topics covered range from the role of the adult, the needs of the child, effective partnerships, positive interventions and proposed outcomes. It also covers theories linking with transitions in the early years including a range of theorists.

This handbook is designed to facilitate effective communication for learning and development during transitions, focussing on a child transitioning from a school Nursery to Reception class. If practitioners follow this guidance, it will improve outcomes, the happier and more comfortable the children are in a setting, the more they will progress. Parents and families need to be satisfied with the process too. This guide will help to support a smooth transition.

What is a transition and why are they important?

Children experience transitions from a young age and in various situations. They can be challenging and stressful to deal with and it is suggested that they should be initiated gradually. According to Trodd (2012) transitions are special events that take place at various periods in life. Staff members may need to support children emotionally and practically during these as transitions can be conceived as 'risky shifts'. The main aim of a setting should be to make the transition process smooth, positive and continuous. Transitions can also be viewed as rites of passage, when referring to these with children they can be seen as forward-moving steps that are identified by social rituals or celebrations. Smooth transitions benefit children and their families because if the children are happy going into their setting, the parents feel comfortable leaving them there and develop trust with the key workers.

Horizontal transitions are regular occurrences and are less significant. This may include taking part in yearly events for instance the Christmas concert. Vertical transitions are key changes for example moving from one setting to another. Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead (2008) state that a Horizontal transition refers to events that take place daily and they involve routine movements for example from their childminder to nursery. Children's well-being is impacted by these institutions. Vertical transitions are referred to as important shifts from one situation to another often connected with 'upward shifts' for example moving from Primary to Secondary school. Fabian and Dunlop (2007, cited in Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008) believe that 'education-associated transition processes' have been viewed with less importance as they are not as formal, they often refer to social changes outside the education settings for example if a child's parents were getting divorced. However, these can be seen as 'peripheral' and may have a crucial impact of shaping children's experiences, pathways and well-being.



Source: Willow, 2022

The Needs of the Child

What do children need during transition times?

The needs of the child are paramount when ensuring smooth transitions. Unicef (2019) argues that “Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.”

Practitioners need to communicate effectively with children and their families to ensure they have a broad understanding of the actions that need to be taken to meet each individual child’s needs. According to Brooker (2008) one of the main responsibilities for staff is to consider the children’s views, the evaluation and regulation of services and policies must include consultation to this.

Relationships

Children need positive relationships with key workers to ensure they are comfortable and thriving in their setting. For young children, the stronger the relationships, the easier it is for them to adapt and settle in. Brooker (2008) says that a vital aspect of young children’s transitions is forming a positive relationship with practitioners. Initially children may form an attachment and become highly dependent on the key worker, this will decrease as the child becomes more confident. Other children may exhibit independence and detachment from the practitioners, which over time will become less necessary when the child gains trust. Each child will have their own individual style of bond that suits their preferences which the practitioners will adapt to.

Attachment Theory

John Bowlby developed the attachment theory. Bowlby (1969, cited in Wilson-Ali, Barratt-Pugh and Knaus, 2019) points out that the development of attachment theory was motivated by the need to investigate how a young child reacts to the short-term loss of their mother, which in-hand influenced how relationships and personality development was perceived. There are primary attachment figures which are often the mother or anyone in the ‘mother-figure role’. He believed that babies and young children automatically develop attachments and need to be within a close proximity to these people. There are also secondary attachments that children may develop which are sometimes with key workers. The children maintain a close attachment relationship with these people and they provide security when their primary attachment is not around, the secondary attachment often has a good bond with their primary attachment figure. However, Scharer (2018) states that some educators believe it can be classed as ‘unhealthy’ to have close attachment

relationships with children. Some settings will support attachments initially, before distributing the care between educators.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow created a hierarchy of needs that need to be met for each child to learn and develop to their full potential. According to McLeod (2022) the requirements to meet a child's needs which are lower down the hierarchy must be met before the needs higher up are attended to. This links with transitions because for a child to be able to achieve and progress, their physiological and safety needs should be met, enabling the children to form relationships and attachments with staff in settings. Once these have been established, they can build up self-esteem and self-actualisation.

Source: Hopper, 2020



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Play and Schemas

Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy (2002) points out that play is fundamental for children to develop physically, socially, mentally, emotionally and creatively. Childcare settings should be rich, stimulating learning environments promoting free-play. Outdoor play is beneficial for children as they learn about the world that they live in and it promotes development. Reception classrooms should have an outdoor area that is always accessible for children to use. Murray (2018) suggests that people who are not engaged in free-play may find the benefits difficult to understand, it can be under-valued. However, early childhood educators promote the value to others. They claim that along with its

significance as a purely recreational activity, it may have positive therapeutic, social, and exploratory effects on children's life in general.

Featherstone (2014) maintains that children use play and exploration to demonstrate developing thoughts and ideas. Schemas are defined as recurring patterns of behaviour that enable children to explore. Schematic play can be used to pinpoint children's interests as an individual, making the learning opportunities powerful through ongoing collaborative learning experiences. The Early Years Foundation Stage says that practitioners must support schematic play. During transitions the environment should be set up appropriately, with plenty of resources available. An organised and stimulating environment will make the transition process easier for the staff and children. Unicef (2019) quote that "Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities".

Froebel's Theory

According to Bruce (2012) Froebel's pedagogy has been reinforced in modern early years developments. The first three years of a child's life are important and have an impact on physical brain development. Froebel emphasises that children have a natural curiosity and the importance of letting 'children be children'. The foundation of Froebel's theory is the value of play, interactive and personalised learning, the benefit of all things natural, nurturing a child's creative talents, and enabling children to take chances. DfE (2012, cited in Tovey, 2012) state that the Early Years Foundation Stage is underpinned by Froebel's main principles. The main themes followed are; Positive relationships, enabling environments, the unique child and how all areas of learning and development interconnect. On the other hand, Froebel's principles are not always followed, as there is an emphasis on outcomes and targets and not the powerful urge children have to learn.



Source: German Culture, 2022

The Role of the Adult

Effective Communication

A key aspect to facilitating successful transitions involves practitioners building positive relationships with children and their families, whilst maintaining effective communication. Children's Workforce Development Council (2010) suggests that communication entails recognising the significance of fostering positive interactions with children, parents, and caregivers. Also, communication builds trust, it may result in the parents valuing the advice of the practitioners and seeking the services that are offered. To ensure positive communication they must have the skills to listen, question, understand and respond appropriately taking into consideration the persons developmental stage, personal needs and circumstances.

Scharer (2018) points out that some educators find it easier to build relationships with parents than others, they do not view themselves as 'partners of parents' but as 'experts'. Being in 'partnerships with parents' sometimes places unrealistic demands on educators' time. Although an open-door policy is promoted, staff are not always in appropriate situations to discuss problems that arise during working hours, as they are busy caring for the children.

Teacher, Practitioners and Headteachers roles

The headteacher, teacher and practitioners must follow the Welsh Government Guidelines and the National Minimum Standards. Welsh government (2017) claim that safeguarding procedures must always be followed appropriately. It is the responsibility of the staff to recognise safeguarding issues and follow the procedures, with the knowledge of who the safeguarding officers are in the setting. This links back to effective communication being essential, if there are any signs of neglect during the transition process, they can be reported immediately. Unicef (2019) quote in article 19 that "Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them". According to Welsh Government (2017) the children also have the right to play and education and basic care and survival. Staff must ensure this is taking place within the setting.

Childcare practitioners should provide a nurturing environment making sure the children's well-being is priority and their needs whilst in their care are met. They should be viewed holistically. Welsh government (2017) state that when with their carers children should feel

relaxed and comfortable in their environment. The role of the practitioner is to attempt to make the transition process and separation from carers as least stressful and anxiety provoking as possible.

Promoting Inclusion

All staff must promote their school as an inclusive and diverse environment which provides appropriate support for all children. According to Nutbrown, Clough and Selbie (2012) inclusion is not only classed as involving children with special educational needs but also referring to children from diverse backgrounds. The staff should be responsive to this and have policies in place should any issues arise, these can be referred to. Unicef (2019) maintain that “The convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, sex, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background.” If a setting is inclusive the transitions should be smoother.

Role Models

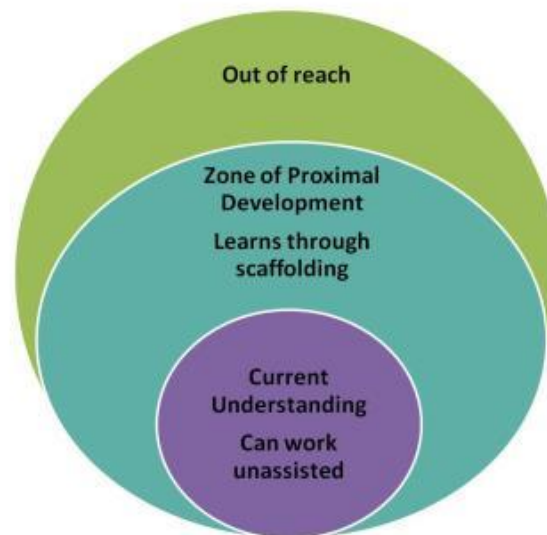
The way that children act may depend on whether they have positive or negative role models around them. A practitioner should always set a good example to the children in their care and display behaviours and values that would benefit the children if they were to be copied. Pound (2006) suggests that Bandura believed that learning results from stimulus and response, nevertheless reinforcement takes place after observing and imitating other people. Bandura’s theory is called the social learning theory and should be considered when working in a childcare setting. Parents will feel more comfortable leaving their children with good role models and that will therefore make the transition more positive.

Vygotsky’s Theory and Zone of Proximal Development

Bresler, Cooper and Palmer (2001) claim that Vygotsky’s work on the structure and development of human consciousness explains how children internalise language during their cultural development. Pound (2006) points out that Vygotsky emphasised how children’s cultural and social environments affect their development. He placed importance on language, as the outcome is social interaction. According to Bresler, Cooper and Palmer (2001) the Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between a child’s independent achievements and what they can achieve with the support of an adult or child with more skills or experience. This is known as ‘scaffolding’ in childcare settings. Pound (2006) states that the environment has an impact on how children learn and develop, staff need to observe carefully what children are already achieving and challenge them within the planning of the curriculum.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky believed the learner constructs their knowledge and understanding from their experiences. Nevertheless, Piaget believed in child-led learning and placed importance on personal experiences and Vygotsky placed emphasis on the social aspects of the experiences.

Zone of Proximal Development



Source: Harrington-Atkinson, 2021

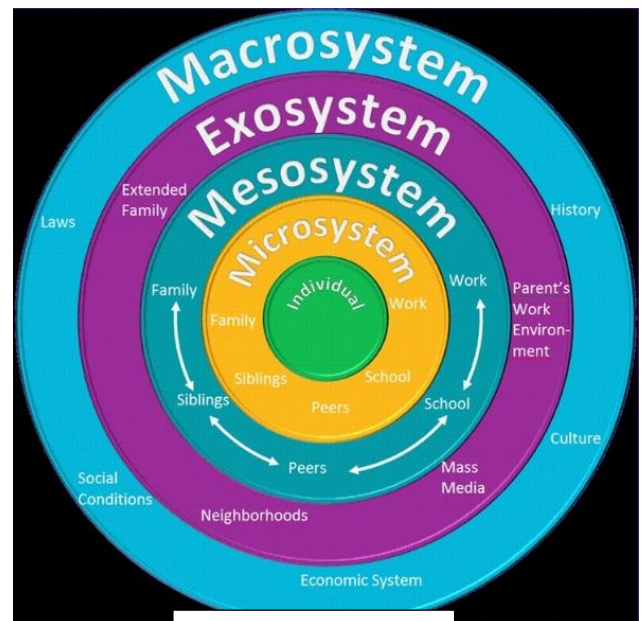
Partnerships

Bronfenbrenner's Theory

Lindon and Brodie (2016) state that Bronfenbrenner created the ecological systems theory. He believed each child's development is affected based on the environment they are in and if children are in isolation they will not develop. He viewed every child as unique.

The model has four layers:

- Microsystem – considers the children's direct, daily experiences with their friends, family or peers. They may also be in childcare settings or schools.
- Mesosystem – this is the set of links between the microsystems and Bronfenbrenner believed this is the most important part of the model when promoting well-being. He also thought that the children will have better outcomes if they have strong links and more of them. Brooker (2008).
- Exosystem – this is the social system that influences children. The impact may arise from their personal experiences directly or indirectly through family. Neighbourhoods and local social networks are significant factors.
- Macrosystem - broad societal institutions including education, economics, and cultural values are included in this circle. Lindon and Brodie (2016).



Source: Marie, 2017

Bronfenbrenner's model shows the significance relationships and environmental factors have on the child.

Multi-agency Working

Staff will need the ability to communicate effectively with other professionals to ensure the needs of the child and their families are met. According to Children's Workforce Development Council (2010) when partaking in multi-agency working staff will be communicating with different services, agencies and professionals. It can also be described as integrated working and is when all professionals supporting the children communicate effectively when making decisions, supporting the needs of the children and their families to improve their lives. Practitioners should respect the roles of other agencies and their knowledge with the main aim being children gaining the best possible outcomes.

Partnerships with parents during transitions

Practitioners need to have good partnerships with parents, especially during transition periods to provide support for both the children and their families. Brooker (2008) maintains that parents seek re-assurance and should be respected. The changes the children will experience need to be explained to the adults in-depth. Making sure the parents know their child will be treated as an individual will be re-assuring. Children are more likely to be transitioning with confidence if they are given consistent explanations from trusted adults. Parents should be supported and advised by practitioners to use services that would benefit their families. According to Unicef (2019) "Governments must support parents by creating support services for children and giving parents the help they need to raise their children."



Source: Town Of Westminster Massachusetts, 2017

Interventions

Strategies for positive transitions

There are many strategies that staff can use to facilitate transitions. According to Belfast Education and Library (2011) some useful strategies are:

- Staff from Reception visiting children in the Nursery setting to get to know them, as it is an emotionally secure place.
- Opportunities to spend time in the new classroom and surrounding areas for example the playground and hall to familiarise themselves with them. They can then adapt to the size, noises and activities.
- Arranging a few transition days for the children, including them staying in school for lunch, therefore they can experience the daytime routines.
- Maintain effective communication with parents providing them with information about the setting, who the key people are and tips for them to support a positive transition.
- Provide photographs for the families of the staff that will be working with the children.
- Invite parents into the setting with the children to build positive relationships with the staff. Trodd (2012).

Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 211, quoted in Brooker, 2008) says that “The developmental potential of a setting in a mesosystem is enhanced if the person’s initial transition into that setting is not made alone”. This supports the idea of inviting parents into the setting having a significant effect on transitions. Brooker (2008) points out that Bronfenbrenner thought that the links between every part of the mesosystem must be continued and not a one-off transition event. Links between home and school need to be readily available and frequently reviewed.

Kirklees Council (2019) suggest that staff could take a photograph of the children on a transition day and create a display of all the children when they start. Staff visits to the children’s houses are beneficial and communicating feedback from home to school and school to home. This may be done using an application like ‘See-Saw’, ‘Home-School Diaries’ may be provided or ‘One-page Profiles’. The parents could include any important information about their child in these. Brooker (2008) believes that children bringing in familiar objects from home may offer security and comfort to support them to settle in.

Proposed Outcomes

Observations

According to Foundation Phase Curriculum (no date) practitioners need to be able to monitor children and respond to them correctly, guided by knowledge of how children learn and develop as well as a clear awareness of potential next steps in that development.

It is important that practitioners observe the children which is promoted in both the Reggio Emilia and Te Whariki approach. Pound (2006) states that Te Whariki is the New Zealand early years curriculum, when assessing the children 'learning stories' are used, they put the child at the centre of the evaluation process.

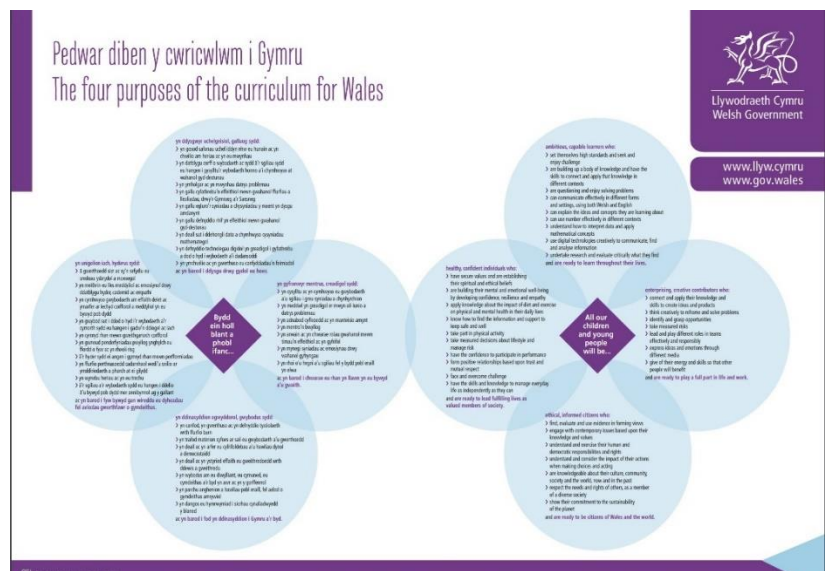
Lindon (2012) states that the Reggio Emilia approach in Northern Italy has been supported by the United Kingdom. Thornton and Brunton (2009, cited in Lindon, 2012) believe that this approach allows staff to be more flexible with time management and use of space, letting the children lead their learning with their interests and constructively challenging early childhood education.

Observations and assessment are beneficial and should be continuous, especially during transitions. Brooker (2008) maintains that practitioners use assessments to plan appropriate interventions and provision for the child. However, Bennett (2006, cited in Brooker, 2008) points out that some assessments by staff may be used for proof of accountability.

Outcomes

According to Welsh Government (2020) the New Curriculum for Wales children in school should strive to be:

- Ambitious, capable learners.
- Healthy, confident individuals.
- Ethical, informed citizens.
- Enterprising, creative contributors.



The outcome of a successful transition would be that the children are happy and confident individuals that are comfortable in the setting that they attend daily. The nurturing environment should make them feel secure and they will be developing at their own level. They should begin to form relationships with staff and other children, become increasingly independent and be engaged when exploring the environment around them. Trodd (2012) is convinced that children will excel in school if their well-being is looked after. If they are happy, self-confident, well-motivated and healthy they should succeed.

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