Collaboration and the transition to school: Opportunities, expectations, aspirations and entitlements

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What is transition?

- Transitions as times when ‘individuals change their role in their community’s structure’ (Rogoff, 2003, p. 150)

- Role changes for all involved.

- For children:
  - Specific events – such as starting school
  - Subtle, complex processes of ‘becoming somebody’
  - Constructing a ‘school’ identity...
Key research findings

- Transition to school can be both rewarding and challenging for all involved (children, families, educators, communities)

- Educational transitions impact on engagement with learning

- Transition is a process, not a one-off event

- Effective transitions are based on strong, positive relationships

- Meaningful collaboration among stakeholders can contribute to effective transition experiences
Thinking about effective transitions ...

- **Effective transitions** are often emphasise continuity:
  - *seamless, smooth, gradual, peaceful, invisible*...

- **Problematic transitions** emphasise discontinuity:
  - *challenges, risks, stresses*...

- Which children are expected to have an effective – or problematic – transition?

- Much focus is on readiness, learning, and continuity:
  - Readiness: whose?
  - Learning: whose? How is this judged?
  - Continuity: of what?

- Changing the conversation...
Supporting transition

- Supporting children, families and educators

- Recognising transition as a time of both continuity and change – for all involved

- Focusing on transitions as a time of relationship building

Transition to school: Position Statement

- Transition to school is characterised by:
  - opportunities
  - aspirations
  - expectations
  - entitlements
### Opportunities to…

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<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Educators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>continue shaping their identities and to extend their existing knowledge, skills and understandings through interactions with adults, peers and family.</td>
<td>strengthen and support each child’s ongoing learning and development.</td>
<td>build relationships with children, families, other educators and communities that provide the basis for effective learning and teaching interactions.</td>
<td>recognise starting school as a significant event in the lives of children and families.</td>
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<td>look forward to making friends and learning at school.</td>
<td>look forward to positive educational outcomes for their children – both social and academic.</td>
<td>work towards professional partnerships that create strong and supportive educational environments for all children.</td>
<td>seek to provide ongoing support and resources to promote children’s positive engagement in school.</td>
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## Expectations as...

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<td>start school expecting to learn and face challenges; they expect to be with friends and to have support from responsive adults.</td>
<td>expect their knowledge to be recognised and respected; they expect to contribute to their children’s education and to work in partnership with educators.</td>
<td>expect to have support and appropriate professional recognition as they create positive learning and teaching environments, partnerships with families, other educators and professionals.</td>
<td>expect schools to attend to the wellbeing of all children and to promote active citizenship and engagement.</td>
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## Entitlements as...

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<td>access high quality education that demonstrates respect for existing competencies, cultural heritage and histories.</td>
<td>demonstrate confidence that their children will have access to education that promotes equity and excellence and that attends to the wellbeing of all children.</td>
<td>receive professional regard and access ongoing professional development..</td>
<td>are regarded as essential contributors to children’s education.</td>
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Collaboration

- Using the Position Statement framework, transition can be a time of collaboration with children, families, communities and other educators and professionals.
- Effective collaboration is built on relational trust
Relational trust

- Elements of relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002):
  - **Social respect** – acknowledging that many people are involved in transitions and valuing the contributions of this range of people
  - **Personal regard** – willingness to participate, create and maintain a climate of openness, to listen, share information and discuss
  - **Competence** – recognition of the competence of each participant
  - **Perceived integrity** – all involved are consistent in what they say and do. Engagement is ethical.
Collaborating with children

All about school: A book to build connections

Children who attend our centre will move to many different schools – too many and across an area too large to participate in all the transition programmes. To help manage this and to promote connections between the children and the various schools, we have a scrapbook – *All about school* – about transition and we invite children and families to share information in this book. Educators also make contributions. The book is available at all times on a special table for children families and educators to contribute to and to read and review.
The things that I liked about school were having friends and learning how to go somewhere without my parents. I loved everything about starting school because of all the games and fun times I had. The thing I didn't like about school was not having my mother there with me. The new children might have problems without their parents. I would come and help them turn the taps on, tie their shoelaces; help them if they are hurt and if they are struggling to finish something. I think I would be a good buddy because I will show them that big people at school are not as mean as they think we are.
Collaborating with families

A new transition and school setting for Martin

Martin has severe autism, and his enrolment in a special class at the local school was not working. After making the decision to move him to a special school, we met with the teacher – Jane – to develop his transition plan. Jane made many positive suggestions. We felt like we were working together to help Martin make this next transition.

Martin did not commence school until the fourth week of term. This allowed the other children time to settle back into the school routine, re-establish friendships and develop relationships with new staff. When Martin started he made the transition into a settled group and the educators were able to focus on his needs.
For over 10 years one community has celebrated their children starting school through a community picnic. Initially organised by a network of early childhood education professionals, led by the Children’s Services Coordinator from the local city council and lately organised jointly by the coordinator and an early childhood services provider, the School Starters’ Picnic grew out of attempts to increase community awareness and participation in transition to school. Throughout the city, children who are eligible to start school in the following year are invited to the picnic. Activities at the picnic have been run by schools, interagency groups, prior-to-school providers and various other community groups.
We work on learning stories for all our children. We put them in a journal and encourage the children and families to take their learning journal along to school and show their new teachers.

A few years ago, we heard back from the teachers at the school. They said, *Oh it was fabulous that you’ve done all that* and let the children show them for news. But they weren’t regarding them as useful information from fellow educators.

One time I asked them if they used the learning journals to help plan for the children.

One said, *They’re no use at all. They don’t tell us what we want to know.*

*That’s not the information we’re looking for*

I was just speechless.
Professional collaboration

But now things have changed. Now we meet mostly informally, but as well we have a more formal meeting once a fortnight. We talk about what we are doing and why. We visit each other’s classrooms and, when we visit, we ask about what we see happening and compare that with what we are doing in the preschool.

It had a lot to do with leadership. We have leaders who could see what was happening and decided to change it. They helped us re-frame our thinking so we were not the school and the preschool – we started referring to ourselves as a learning community.
Recall...

- Transitions as a time of continuity and change.
  - Often we focus on the changes we observe – and expect – from children.
  - One of the most important forms of continuity relates to professional relationships.

- Opportunities, aspirations, expectations, entitlements of educators
  - Often about professional relationships, partnerships, professional support and professional regard
Continuity of professional relationships between ECE and school

- Moss (2013)
  - readying for school;
  - a strong and equal partnership;
  - a meeting place.

- Boyle & Petriwskyj (2014)
  - functional linkages;
  - systemic linkages;
  - partnership interactions;
  - dialogic interactions.
## Professional relationships

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<th>Moss 2013</th>
<th>Boyle &amp; Petriwskyj 2014</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<td>Readying for school</td>
<td>Functional linkages</td>
<td>School readiness discourse. Function of ECE is to prepare children for school. Continuity = making children ‘ready’ for school</td>
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<td>Strong and equal partnership</td>
<td>Systemic linkages Partnership interactions</td>
<td>Continuity in contact in between systems (ECEC, school, family). Continuity = smooth intersection of systems. Collaboration among stakeholders, e.g. through networks, transition programs Partnership interactions bring together school and ECE, focusing on the strengths of both. Question equality of partners.</td>
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<td>A meeting place</td>
<td>Dialogic interactions</td>
<td>Creating a shared vision to ‘explore pedagogical possibilities and risks’ (Moss) Continuity = shared philosophical vision built on school and ECE traditions. Site for reflection, analysis, critique. Transformative interactions.</td>
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Much current interest in local transition networks – identified as a promising practice to promote positive transitions (Victoria)

Formal (e.g. local government, inter-agency, NGOs) and informal networks

Can be sites for professional development, sometimes as a form of PD

Confusion about what constitutes a network; is network a phenomenon or a metaphor?

What is required to make a meeting a network?
What is required for an effective network?

- A clear purpose or reason to meet
- Leadership – both for within the network as well as from school/ECE leadership

  “I think it [ability to communicate across settings] comes also from our bosses…our principal is very community minded. He works very closely with all the other public schools in town, and the high school”

- Mutual understandings
- Professional respect
- Organisation – informal or formal
- Commitment – effort and time
Networks

Being proactive: Transition focus group
This group was started by and ECE educator who aimed to strengthen connections and communication between her ECE setting and the local school.
The group – first year of school teachers and ECE teachers – meet regularly usually face-to-face, but sometimes by Skype.
Their action plan includes focus on:
- Intentionality
- Multiple voices
- Responsiveness
- Wellbeing
- Pedagogy and play
- Professional learning

Bringing community professionals together around the transition to school
A large network (over 40 participants). Word got around and the network grew. Meet once a term, but smaller groups meet more often.
Network as a means to compile and share information – we can talk about the data and respond collaboratively.
Achievements include health screening days for children; establishment of a playgroup; collaborative development of information for our community...
Advantages of networks...

- Help build a culture of respect and collaboration
- Shares the daily work of teachers – which is often invisible
- Sites for professional recognition, critique, reflective practice
- Working collaboratively can promote positive change
- Can be a forum for whole-of-community focus on transition to school.
Conclusions ...

- Collaboration – with children, families, communities and other professionals – has the potential to provide opportunities to enhance transition to school programs through clarifying the expectations and entitlements of all involved and building aspirations for what could be done in each community.

- Networks can provide one avenue for professional collaboration.
Conclusions

- Collaboration can promote recognition of both the *continuity* and *changes* involved in transition.

- Professional collaboration can generate a *meeting place* characterised by dialogic interactions, working towards shared goals that have mutual benefit.
References


