



## 2.5

# Transitions and Continuity: Supporting Children and Families Through Change



A socio-cultural perspective of learning recognizes that social and cultural processes shape all aspects of childhood.<sup>1</sup> This perspective sees learning as a context-dependent, socially mediated process that results in development.

## 2.5 Transitions and Continuity: Supporting Children and Families Through Change

Children experience many transitions within a day and throughout the early years. Transitions are embedded in daily living and also mark important milestones for each child's learning and development. Transitions can be defined as the movement between one activity, relationship, or place and another new or familiar activity, relationship, or place. Continuity is defined as a fluid or uninterrupted flow. In early childhood communities the flow between care practices, daily routines, and learning experiences is grounded in educators' values and perspectives of learning and also related to their relationships with children and families. The socio-cultural perspective of this curriculum framework supports educators in their work with children and families to enhance continuity in the many transitions that children experience. Enhancing continuity in transitions for children's experiences influences their well-being and learning as they move within and between the familiar and unfamiliar in their daily living, playing, and learning.

Children experience many transitions; here are just a few.

- The transition between home and child care, and back again, happens daily and is often one of the first significant transitions that the child and family experience.
- Daily transitions between care, play, and learning in the program are intended to provide important nurturing for children's well-being and learning. When children do not know what to expect in daily routines, the transitions between them can prompt feelings of insecurity and confusion.
- Transitions brought about by the flow and movement of life events, sometimes unexpected, can generate excitement, as well as stress for children and families as they resituate themselves within new early childhood communities.
- The milestone that marks a child entering formal school is another transition that is exciting yet can create uncertainty for a child and family with its unfamiliar rules, expectations, and people.



- The transition between formal school and out-of-school care continues for children as they grow beyond the early years toward their middle years.

As an educator, when you work with children and families to thoughtfully plan ahead for change, you contribute to children's learning and well-being.

The **socio-cultural perspective of learning** promotes strong family and strong early childhood community connections for young children's well-being and learning. As educators, when you apply this perspective to the various transitions within early learning and child care, you can foster continuity in transitions for each child and his or her family. When you work with families and children to think about and talk about transitions—how each member experiences a transition and the ways for making transition experiences more fluid—you create spaces where people come together to imagine possibilities for each child and family. A **practice of relationships** supports educators to work with children, families, and others in the early childhood community to **co-construct** continuity in transitions for the benefit of each child and family's well-being and learning.

**It takes time to build new relationships.** As educators support and respect each child's relationship with his or her family, they help each child to build new and trusting relationships within early childhood communities. Thoughtful and unrushed transitions have the potential to foster positive relationships in the way that people meet and exchange information.

Understanding how each child and family experiences transition rituals as they move between home and child care supports everyone in the early childhood community—children, families, and educators. Educators working within a practice of relationships are respectful of family rituals that form these transitions. Rituals and transitional objects such as a treasured stuffed bear, a photo of family, a shared story with dad before he leaves, wearing mom's scarf, or high fives at the door—are family rituals that reflect each child's family, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions.

#### Think about:

- the child–family rituals that you see in your child care setting.
- how you organize time, space, and materials in ways that help a child to feel connected to family members while in the child care setting.

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- how you make room for children to have transitional objects from home.
- how you design the child care environment to support child–family relationships.
- how the care and learning environment reflect each child and family.
- how you document the child’s daily experiences in ways that help families to see their child with/in the play, learning, and care environment. What information about each child is important to the family?

**Continuity is enhanced when children and families participate in making decisions and imagining possibilities for routines and transitions.** Children experience many care routines and transitions throughout each day in early learning and child care environments, such as when they move from one experience to another, from indoor to outdoor play spaces, and from periods of activity to periods of rest. A strong, resourceful, and capable image of the child calls to mind each child’s right to participate in decisions that affect him or her. When children are invited to make decisions about when and how transitions occur, they understand what is expected of them and what is coming next. This knowing reduces the stress and uncertainty that is often associated with transitions.

When you encourage children to participate in creating familiar and novel routines, you acknowledge children’s right to express an opinion and make decisions and choices in daily experiences.

When a toddler sits at the table and waits to be spoon fed because his parent routinely spoon feeds him, he is expressing his expectation of this familiar family routine. When you feed him, you honour his family practice.

When your team of educators negotiate ways to take three or four children who are already dressed outside for play, rather than having them wait for the whole group, you are making decisions that respect the rights of children and that honour children’s time.



When you respect children's unique rhythms for rest and wake activity, you are responding to children as individuals.

When you inform children about daily events through pictures and print, you respect children's right to be informed about daily events.

Educators can intentionally select practices that help children know what to expect and that respect them as citizens with rights in early childhood communities. Stepping back to reflect on how daily transitions and routines foster children's and families' well-being is important reflective practice.

**Think about:**

- what you know about the social and cultural practices of families and children that can help you to design routines and transitions that are familiar and respectful of this group of children.
- what children are telling you (non-verbally and verbally) that communicates their comfort or discomfort in/through routine and transition times.
- how you encourage children to make choices in their daily experiences that support their learning and living as citizens.
- how you help children to know, anticipate, and make decisions about how their day will unfold.
- how you document children's experiences through transitions in ways that reveal an image of the child as a learner and citizen.

**Enhancing continuity is particularly important during transitions within and between early learning and child care programs, and formal school settings.** This can happen when there is a change in educators at a child care centre, a change in playrooms for a child, or when life events create change for families, taking them to a new early learning and child care environment. It also occurs when children transition from child care to formal schooling and from child care to out-of-school care. These transitions can involve shifting relationships, when a child and family leave the care of a familiar and well-loved educator of a playroom or community to begin a relationship with someone new.

When educators work together with children and families to build continuity in the transition between early childhood programs, they help families and children build familiarity with these new circumstances.



Often underlying all transitions is the strain of uncertainty for children and their families. What will the educators or teachers be like? What will they expect of me? Will I know their rules? Will they like me? Change can be both exciting and stressful. It takes time to build new relationships and adjust to new rules, routines, rhythms, and spaces. When educators work together with children and families to build continuity in the transitions between early childhood programs, they help families and children build familiarity with these new circumstances. Planning ahead, gathering information, and visiting all help children and their families to become familiar and more confident about making the transition to a new early childhood program. This preparation is enhanced when educators and teachers work collaboratively with each child and family in ways that support them moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Working this way can foster continuity for children's learning and well-being, as well as for the family.

The following reflective statements and questions are intended to guide your thoughtful planning for enhancing the experience of continuity for the child and family during transitions between early learning communities. These ideas can be used to guide discussions, share perspectives and information, and imagine possibilities with children and families.

#### **Think about:**

- what you document about each child's play and learning that will help his or her family to communicate who this child is, as a mighty learner and citizen, to the educators or teachers in the new early learning and child care setting or school community.
- what you do to help this family and child begin a respectful and reciprocal relationship with educators or teachers in the new early childhood community. **Think about** time for building relationships with new adults and peers, making visits to the new playroom or classroom. Is there opportunity for the child and family to spend time playing in the outdoor space of the new early learning and child care setting?
- how you support the child's learning and sense of belonging to flourish as he or she moves into a new learning community. What are her questions? How might you help him to prepare for and embrace change? How do you support her to gather important information about rules and routines? How can you support the transition in the months before—and first few weeks of—the transition to a new early childhood or school community?



- how you help families find information regarding expectations, rules, and routines in the new early childhood or school community.

By coming together to address these ideas, the possibility for continuity in transitions between early learning and child care environments and formal schooling is enhanced. When you view every child as a learner already, rather than “getting ready to learn” as they enter school, a shift in perspective occurs. The socio-cultural perspective situates each child as a learner from birth, a mighty learner and citizen. When you work alongside children and their families to nurture each child’s learning, well-being, and sense of belonging, you foster continuity for each child’s care, play, learning, and development—today and tomorrow.

