Play-Lost in Transition?

Exploring teachers’ beliefs to promote pedagogic continuity

Linda Bellen
Why? The impetus...

The transition to school

- Kindergarten as the new Year 1
- Disappearance of play
- Concerns about children's adjustment in the first year of school
- Lack of communication and reciprocal relationships btw EC and schools
What does research tell us?

10-20% of children may experience difficulty adjusting.

Successful adjustment is important for children's long term success and well-being.

Role & relationships of educators across both sectors is critical in ensuring success.

Effective transitions can minimise discontinuity and build on children's prior learning.
Transition to formal schooling

- **Transitions are complex** – the critical point in the pedagogical divide between early years services and schools
- **Teachers** – are critical players and contributors, and implement the transition process
- **Teachers’ pedagogical thinking** – essential to explore to get a sense of their beliefs about play-based pedagogy & pedagogic continuity
Definition of transition

How do you define the transition to school?
Definitions in the research

“Transition to school is taken to be a dynamic process of continuity and change as children move into the first year of school” (Dockett & Perry, 2014, p. 2).

Fabian and Dunlop (2002) suggest that the period of transition commences at the preschool level (the year immediately before Kindergarten), followed by an initial settling-in stage, and continues until the child feels settled and established in the new school environment.

Broström (2002) refers to this as supporting children to “feel suitable in school” (p. 52) such that children have a feeling of well-being and belonging.

Definitions should move beyond short orientation periods and induction events, characteristic of many transition programs, to transition being a *lengthy process* (DEECD, 2009; Educational Transitions and Change Research Group, 2011; Johannson, 2007; Petriwskyj, 2010).
Theoretical Framework - Bronfenbrenner

**CHRONOSYSTEM**

**MACROSYSTEM**

**EXOSYSTEM**

**MESO SYSTEM**

**MICROSYSTEM**

**CHILD**

- Teachers (Prior-to-school setting & school)
- Interaction of microsystems
- Community & health services, government agencies/support neighbourhood
- Social values & cultural beliefs, attitudes, political agendas, laws
- Extended family
- Workplace
- Neighbourhood
- Local politics
- Social welfare

**ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY**

(Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979)
"How do teachers' beliefs about play-based pedagogy contribute to their constructs of pedagogic continuity across the transition to school?"
Key research questions

1. How do prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based learning and teaching?

2. What do prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?

3. What factors influence prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers’ decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?
The documents: EYLF & transition to school

**Principles**
- Partnerships (DEEWR, 2009, p. 12)
- Ongoing learning and reflective practice (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13)

**Practice**
- Learning through play (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15)
- Intentional teaching (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15)
- Continuity of learning & transitions (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16)
Australian Curriculum (AC) & the transition to school

- AC – focus on content, standards based approach to assessment, not much attention to pedagogy
- Sets out what needs to be taught but not HOW – suggests teachers make the decision about how to teach the content
- Minimal focus on the transition to school
Sources of data

Case Study 1

4 Prior-to-school teachers

- Interview from 1 High SES
- Interview from 1 Low SES
- Interview from 1 High EAL
- Interview from 1 Low EAL

Document sources

Data analysis (Thematic)

Case Study 2

4 Kindergarten teachers

- Interview from 1 High SES
- Interview from 1 Low SES
- Interview from 1 High EAL
- Interview from 1 Low EAL

Document sources

Cross case analysis

Data Analysis (Thematic)
Why pedagogic continuity?

“Children do not ‘magically’ become different kinds of learners as they move from prior-to-school settings into the first years of school”

(Connor, 2012, p. 28)
Let’s talk...

- What is your understanding of play-based pedagogy?
  
  (What do you believe are key aspects to consider?)

- How would you describe the educator’s role in play-based pedagogy?
What did the teachers say?

Views of play-based pedagogy

- Play as active exploration
- Play as purposeful, child-centred pedagogy
- Limited place for play
- Various roles of the educator
Play-based pedagogy in the literature

Pedagogy: what “practitioners actually DO and THINK” (Moyles et al., 2005, p.5)

Play-based pedagogy:
- Synodi (2010) – a mixture of child-initiated or child-directed play, teacher-directed play and mutually directed play of both teachers and children.


- Wood (2010) – suggests teachers should utilise an integrated approach of both child-initiated and teacher-directed activities where teachers plan for play with the children, based on their interactions and observations.

EYLF:
Definitions of pedagogy, play-based learning, involvement and intentional teaching are all separate
Let’s talk some more...

- What does the term **pedagogic continuity** mean to you? Do you consider this important to consider in the transition to school? Why/why not?

  Please discuss with some partners close by and also consider the following question...

- How do your transition practices support and promote pedagogic continuity so that each child feels “suitable”? 
What did the teachers say?

- “I think it's very hard for them to go from this to sitting at a desk, very formal teaching” (EC1)

- “Yeah, yeah definitely. It is a different environment. That's what we have to be aware of. It's a totally different environment for them...” (EC4)

- “Unfortunately that is, it just seems to be there is a huge cut off... and it’s just like, that was preschool [clap] this is school. There is no crossover. That's just part of it. That's just the way it is unfortunately” (PT1)

- “To go from here to there I think there's just a big step... I don't think there is a continuity I would say. I think there could be a better continuity and a more successful continuity...” (PT4)
Some key themes

Constructs of pedagogic continuity

Differing expectations
- Minimal crossover
- The shock of formal learning
- The play/learn divide

Academic push-down
- Notions of school readiness
- The ‘schoolification’ of preschool
- Crowded curriculum and less play

Aspects of enhancing continuity
- Play as a transition bridge
- Recognition of prior experiences
- Collaborative exchange
Recommendation 1:

- Towards a new definition for play-based pedagogy... let’s try together!

- What do you believe should be included to help define the role of the educator within this definition? Discuss.
Responsive, reflective educators provide a balance of child-directed and adult-guided purposeful and meaningful play possibilities to support and extend children’s thinking and learning based on their inquiries and interests. Educators co-construct knowledge with children, in both planned and spontaneous opportunities, achieved through the use of intentional teaching strategies that are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful to promote sustained shared thinking and high quality verbal interactions.

Any feedback?
Recommendation 2:

- Reconceptualising ‘ready schools’ and a new early years continuum

A question to ponder...

- What do you consider is important in your concept of ‘ready schools’?
Recommendation 3:

- Change at the policy level
- Change the macrosystem level perceptions (societal views & cultural beliefs) so that there can be a shift in how play-based pedagogy is viewed in early years education
What can we do?

- View transition as a process not an event – programming and planning for it throughout the year
- Establish transition policies in services/schools
- Create early years transition networks in your community
- Establish collaborative partnerships with the schools in your area – to find a ‘pedagogical meeting place’
What can we do? (cont’d)

- Advocate for play-based pedagogy – feel confident to articulate the value of learning and teaching through play and to articulate your pedagogical expertise
- Consider joint professional learning opportunities and reciprocal visits
- Foster a greater understanding of EYLF in school sector – Professional development to help teachers in schools understand how children’s play continues to develop and mature
And some final words from one of the research participants...

“I would also say that it's the way our education system is set up on a whole... it's not about what we believe at the moment, until the system actually changes we're in a system where we want to see improvements and until that actually changes and our whole system is changed we're with the system that we're in now and we need to produce the results that people expect to see” (PT4)