



Transitions: between groups, settings and beyond

In the final article in our series on supporting children's transitions, we visit an early learning centre in Melbourne to find out how the educators build partnerships with families to support their children's transitions and their social and emotional wellbeing.

Case study No.3

MLC Kindle
Kew, Victoria

'The excitement is infectious from the children, they love it!'

MLC Kindle—the Early Learning Centre at Methodist Ladies' College in Melbourne—provides long day care for children aged up to three, and a mix of full time and sessional kindergarten programs for three- and four-year-olds. The centre places families at the centre of the transition process, given the critical roles of families in supporting their children's 'spiritual wellbeing and sense of security' during transitions, centre director Rebecca Drysdale says.

'We endeavour to develop positive, responsive relationships with children and families from the beginning by being friendly and having a culture of open communication,' Rebecca says. In addition to holding a meeting with each family before their child starts at the centre, the educators also send out a 'welcome book', containing photos of MLC Kindle and some of the activities in the child's new room. 'The welcome book also displays photographs and the names of the educators who will be in their classroom,' she explains. 'Parents are then able to have a conversation with their child about our service and they can see fun, colourful and positive images of MLC Kindle.'

Educators encourage new families to spend time with their child at the centre, and to slowly extend the visits until they encompass one of the 'routine' parts of the day, such as lunch or rest time. They also work to ensure that the child develops a close attachment with at least one educator. 'Educators discuss the child's progress with the parent, and together the parent and educator make a decision about when it is okay to leave the child at the service by himself or herself,' says Rebecca.

One of the most innovative transition practices at MLC Kindle is a 'home visits' program. This involves one of the child's educators making a visit to the child's home, to meet with the family and enjoy some social time together. The program was developed during the centre's participation in the KidsMatter Early Childhood pilot program in 2010–11. 'During that period, we had lots of time to reflect with our facilitator, and this is where we came up with the idea,' Rebecca explains. 'Reflecting on our practice and wanting to improve, asking "How can we do things better" and "How can we connect better with parents and carers". I can tell you that the visits have become more and more popular every year—I think that's because we've grown with it, and we've become more and more confident with implementing them.'

The home visits program was conceived as a way of helping educators and children connect at the beginning of each year, but the program has evolved and changed, so that families can now choose to have their visit at any time of the year. 'Some families aren't comfortable with us coming in at the beginning of the year,' Rebecca says. 'When they become more comfortable with us in the learning environment, they say, "We want one now, we're ready".'

Rebecca says the results of the home visits program have been overwhelmingly positive. 'The excitement is infectious from the children, they love it!' she says. 'They work with their parents and they prepare a special afternoon tea, and they talk about it constantly prior and afterwards.' The visits are now firmly embedded in the



Dear Ben,
Thank you so much for showing me around your family home. I had a wonderful time meeting your dad, Georgia and the dogs. I really enjoyed see what footy cards you have started to collect and reading your favourite Dinosaur book which bit my finger. I learnt lots of new facts about dinosaurs. I was very excited to see your Rainbow city house on display in the TV room. I hope you had as much fun as I did.
From Katharine





curriculum at the centre, with educators taking the opportunity to learn more about each child, their family and culture, and to strengthen the partnership between the centre and each family. At the time they developed the visits program, the educators 'realised how closely linked it would be to the Framework, and how it could help us achieve these learning outcomes,' Rebecca says.

Transitions to new groups within MLC Kindle are also a subject of ongoing reflection. This year, the educators have joined two age groups together—the toddlers and the three-year-olds—for lunch times, allowing the younger children to meet educators from the other room, and giving the older children the chance to scaffold the toddlers' learning about their environment. 'A lot of the conversation you hear is from the toddlers asking the three-year-olds, "What do you do there?"; "What do you do when you go to music?" So there's lots of that conversation going on,' says Rebecca.

The educators have also, for the first time, opened the doors between the two four-year-old rooms, helping the children to make connections with peers who will be attending the same school next year.

When it comes to preparing the children for their move to formal schooling, Rebecca says that a play-based curriculum is more than adequate for 'school readiness'. 'Although early numeracy and literacy skills are important for children as they move into the school



setting, it is also imperative that they learn how to cope with social and emotional difficulties,' she explains. 'Playground politics can be challenging for young children and we help them develop good problem-solving and negotiating skills, as well as the ability to deal with conflicts that may arise.'

The educators at MLC Kindle also run a transition program in the kindergarten year, which involves both children and educators making a visit to their future school. Educators prepare *Transition Learning and Development Statements* for school-based teachers, and provide plenty of information and encouragement for parents, through a 'transition evening' at the beginning of Term 4. At the end of Term 4, children spend two weeks engaged in practical transition activities, including 'packed lunch days,' where they bring their own lunch box to school and practice their sandwich wrap skills.

But Rebecca says that relationships are the single most important part of school readiness: 'It's important for early childhood educators, parents and prep teachers to make connections with each other, in order for children to feel safe and secure as they move from their early learning environment to their new school learning environment. Effective communication between educators, parents and teachers is critical to a child's successful transition to formal education'.



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