

Book Review

Understanding transitions in the early years: Supporting change through attachment and resilience by Anne O'Connor

Sherideen Lange | *New Zealand Tertiary College*

This book draws on findings from neuroscience and attachment theory to explain how prioritising relationships during the transition process, is beneficial, both for fostering children's emotional resilience and for developing trust with children and their families. This recently revised second edition includes specific information for toddlers, as well as school readiness and working with families through transitions. The author discusses how young children will typically experience many transitions before the age of five; and for many of them the first major transition will be from their home into an early childhood setting. Adapting to a new environment can be challenging for young children and the stress of managing change and separating from their primary carers can have long-reaching implications for their holistic development, particularly their emotional wellbeing.

Chapter one explores attachment theory and considers the importance of a secure base for children's developing emotional resilience. Differences between secure and insecure attachments are explored and it is proposed that teachers become children's secondary attachment figures. The implementation of a key teacher approach to transition, to provide an optimal context for children's healthy emotional development is discussed.

Chapter two provides an overview of the hierarchical nature of the developing brain; from the reptilian brain (instincts and survival), to the mammalian brain (emotions) and the rational brain (thinking and learning). O'Connor (2018) explains how a young child's stress response system can be triggered during transitions, exploring the long-term implications of high levels of the stress hormone, cortisol and posits the crucial importance of "warm, affectionate and attuned responses" (p. 32) for young children.

Chapter three explores the history of early childhood education in the United Kingdom to help explain why young children experience so many transitions in their early lives. Notions of vertical (between environments) and horizontal (within an environment) transitions that children might experience in their early years are addressed. This chapter emphasises the significance of teachers working in partnership with parents and families in order to best support both types of transitions for children.

In chapter four, the author asks the reader to reflect on their own experiences of transition and change in order to create empathy for children and their parents. The professional responsibility of practitioners to examine the factors which may have positively or negatively impacted on personal transitions is discussed. Bourdieu's ideas of being a 'fish in water' or a 'fish out of water' are discussed and related to the importance of 'belonging' in a new environment. This chapter concludes with an in-depth exploration of ways teachers can support children's transitions.

Chapter five shares strategies that might reduce the number of transitions for children in the early years. It suggests that less formal childcare arrangements might be more beneficial for young children's emotional well-being and offers alternative ideas for early childhood education settings; including family groupings of children rather than age or stage-related groupings which typically have strict or rigid vertical transition policies. The author asks us to consider the implications of alternative practices from the point of view of children, teachers and parents and family, and draws on

Book Review

her own experiences in setting up an early years unit, to propose that both vertical and horizontal transitions need to be based on each child's individual needs.

The final chapter brings the key ideas from the previous chapters together, to offer useful strategies that teachers can use to best support children's well-being during transitions. The author asks practitioners to reflect on the best possible transition experiences for children in their setting and consider what these might look like from each stakeholder's perspective. Key features of an optimal transition experience are identified and, interestingly, the concept of *professional love* is introduced as a call for teachers to think creatively about transition.

This book will be a valuable resource for early childhood practitioners and student teachers. It explores a range of strategies that teachers can implement to support children transitioning into an early childhood centre. The author offers case study examples and questions for reflection. These are intended to guide centre practices, and highlight the small things that teachers can do for children to support them to feel emotionally safe when dealing with the changes that occur when adapting to a new environment.

Reference

O'Connor, A. (2018). *Understanding transitions in the early years: Supporting change through attachment and resilience* (2nd Ed.). Oxon, United Kingdom: Routledge.