

FROM CHAOS TO CALM: Putting what we know into practice

NSCECE Second Year Students & Jane Cawley (Instructor)

Each fall in *Behaviour Guidance II*, we are asked to apply the knowledge we gained in first year, to make linkages to our work with children, to connect to developmental principles and to engage in deep critical thinking and reflection. A tall order!

Our first assignment in this course was called “*Transitions: From Chaos to Calm*”. We were asked to document two situations: one when we were forced to wait our turn (i.e., waiting to check out at the grocery store) and one when we were interrupted and had to switch plans. We then reflected on these events and expressed how these experiences made us feel and behave. Here is a list of the feelings we experienced in part 1: angry, cranky, stressed, bored, frustrated, anxious, disrespected, sad, fearful, and so on. Someone commented that at least she had a cell phone handy to relieve the boredom.

We were then asked to analyse a transition time from our practicum placements. It probably won't surprise you that most of us chose the indoor/outdoor

transition as the one that needed our scrutiny. It also won't surprise you that the

“According to a large multistate study of state-funded prekindergarten programs, preschool children typically spend more than a third of their time in transitions and routines (e.g. standing in line, cleaning up, washing hands, eating) rather than in play and other learning experiences. Unfortunately, the researchers also found that teachers don't conduct such transitions and routines in ways that engage children in conversations with adults or otherwise promote children's learning and development.”

(Early et al, 2005 cited in DAP: Focus on Preschoolers, NAEYC).

impatient and cranky feelings and behaviours experi-

enced by us when we had to wait were very similar to what we observed in the

behaviours of the children. Is it any wonder that children, who have far fewer coping strategies than adults, can begin to demonstrate challenging behaviours?

We then asked ourselves the **BIG question:** Why is waiting hard for young children?

We referred to our understanding of

child development and came to the conclusion that

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A Message from the Director

Dear ECE Colleagues

After six months of meetings, focus groups, surveys, more meetings and then making sense of all of the data, the Strategic Planning Project of NSCECE has come to an end. Now we are moving into the ongoing phase of strategic action. We have developed a final draft of our Vision/ Mission/ Values/ Priorities package and will have a roll out in the New Year. We want to thank the 180+ people who helped inform the strategic planning process by participating in surveys, interviews, focus groups, and workshops. Your insights and assistance have been invaluable.

The NSCECE Board of Directors has defined five key priority areas for the College. These priorities are:

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Inside this issue:

A publication informing the early childhood education community of events, services and professional development opportunities offered by the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education.

- *From Chaos to Calm*
- *In the Resource Centre*
- *Transition Resources*

Please circulate and post this newsletter!

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From Chaos to Calm

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there are many logical reasons that when recognised make it seem ridiculous to design daily routines and transitions that require extended and numerous waiting experiences on the part of young children.

Young children:

- Are naturally egocentric
- Are bodily-kinesthetic learners (especially when bored or upset)
- Are concrete thinkers
- Have limited verbal skills (especially when bored or upset)
- Express feelings with their bodies (especially strong feelings)
- Have developing/not developed self-control
- Have a limited capacity for empathy
- Focus on one aspect of a situation or problem (peer conflicts are complex)

Another BIG question. What skills does a child need to successfully complete a transition? Many transitions have multiple steps, requiring memory, problem solving skills, receptive language skills, social competence, logic, ability to focus without being distracted, and capacity for empathy.

To complete the assignment our instructor asked us to place ourselves in the role of the teacher; the person responsible for the children, the program and potential changes to the daily schedule. She pointed out that with graduation just six months away, it is time to see ourselves as early childhood educators not merely as students.

As we brainstormed ideas for changing our transitions from chaos to calm we came to the conclusion that if the solutions are complicated or if they cost money (hiring more staff) the chances are that the changes either will not happen or will not be sustainable.

As a group we came up with the following tips for designing successful transitions:

1. Observe children during transitions and ask ourselves

- What is working?

- What is not working?
- Are there specific children struggling at transition time or is it all children?
- Does the time of day affect the transition?
- What transitions can we eliminate or change? For example: How could snack be part of free play time?



- What transitions are working well? We can examine the positive transitions to see what is working well and why.
- Analyse the daily schedule at least once a year with a focus on designing a schedule that minimizes transitions and maximizes the time children spend engaged in developmentally appropriate activities.

2. Plan Ahead

- Prepare the environment: Gather materials to support the transition. We could create "transition bags" filled with interesting items to manipulate and/or discuss.

3. Establish predictable routines

- Planning to do things differently can also create interest and excitement.
- Create individual strategies and expectations to meet the needs of individual children.

A Message From the Director

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- Enhance the early childhood education profession;
- Extend our reach and relationships;
- Optimize the learning experience;
- Deliver sustainable growth; and
- Engage and develop our full team.

These priorities will be supported by initiatives which will be managed as projects.

4. Teach children what is expected

- Model expected behaviour – We can create plans for the tidy up transition that are organized and fun. We will model and teach tidying up as each play experience is finished. This will eliminate that huge mess at the end of the morning/afternoon.

5. Prepare children in advance

- Reduce waiting time by asking ourselves questions about each transition. How often does the entire group transition at the same time? For example: Do we normally ask all of the children to tidy up to get ready for outdoor play only to have them wait for a significant time to use the washroom? Are the children engaged in anything interesting while they are waiting?

- Possible solution: Send small groups of children to the washroom and allow the tidy up time to be staggered.

- Use pictorial supports for multi-step transitions.

At the end of the class experience we are able to draw the following conclusions.

- Chaotic transition times often lead to challenging behaviours.
- Some transitions are necessary; some are not.
- Longer periods of uninterrupted play lead to better engagement and involvement with people and with materials.
- We must visualize what a calm and positive transition could look like.
- We must plan for necessary transitions with as much time, energy and thoughtfulness as we plan our curriculum.
- Transition times can and should be FUN for the children and for us!

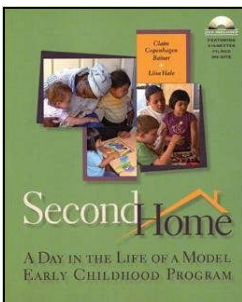
We found this assignment to be particularly relevant because we can see ourselves sharing this knowledge and making a difference when we begin our careers as early childhood educators. We hope you appreciate our reflections on this assignment.

Our initial implementation steps will focus on four key objectives and associated initiatives. This plan is a beginning. We developed it together and with it we will move forward together.

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Transitions in the Resource Centre

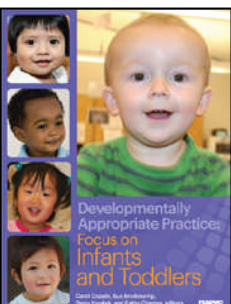
Successful daily routines and transitions lie at the heart of a good day. The Resource Centre has many learning materials and books available to support you in this work. You can look for membership information and check out our online toy inventory at www.nscece.ca. For a virtual tour visit our YouTube video.



Second Home: A Day in the Life of a Model Early Childhood Program (371.3 BA)

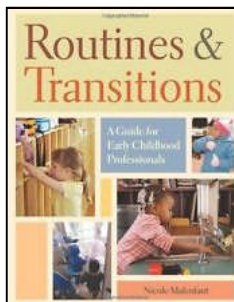
In addition to offering a DVD of vignettes so the reader can see the program in action, this book has a chapter about routines, transitions and schedules that highlights the value of clearly stating what the teacher is doing and what the children are doing during each transition while also highlighting the connections between teacher goals and the child's experience.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Focus on Preschoolers (371.3 CO-P); Focus on Infants and Toddlers (371.3 CO-I)



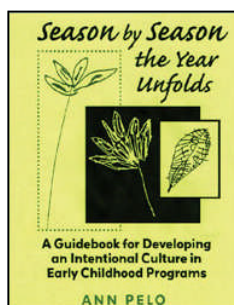
Understanding the abilities and needs of children at different ages and stages and designing your teaching practices and routines with this knowledge in mind is what lies at the heart of developmentally appropriate practice. The current DAP statements are supported by over twenty-five years of conversation, research, and examples of the contrast between developmentally appropriate practices and practices that do not reflect what is known about child development. This descriptive clarity is helpful and allows us to take often unexamined practices and look at them critically using a child development lens.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices: Focus on Infants and Toddlers



Routines and Transitions: A Guide for Early Childhood Professionals (375 MA)

This book offers what the author describes as a democratic approach to routine and transition activities and explores human environment strategies; physical environment strategies; time management strategies; strategies to meet the children's true needs; and strategies that promote educational values. The book advocates taking a problem solving approach to transition difficulties and offers many suggestions for teams to consider as teachers work through this process.



Season by Season the Year Unfolds (371 PE)

This book provides a beautiful example of how our values and beliefs about children and early learning and child-care can be used as a touchstone when we make decisions

about how daily routines and transitions should unfold. Starting from the place of what do we want for children, educators in this program have crafted a vision - looks like, sounds like, feels like - to describe their daily practice so they can share it with families and new staff. They are defining and being explicit about the culture in their classrooms and in their centre.

- Simple Transitions for Infants and Toddlers (375.7 MI-T)
- Routines-Based Early Interventions (371.9 MCWI)
- Jelly Beans in a Jar: Inclusive Child Care (371.9 CAS)
- Making Visual Supports (371.94 SAV)
- The Intentional Teacher (372 EP-I-R)

Learning Communities

ALL TOGETHER NOW! INCLUSION SUPPORT GROUP

A facilitated learning community for those interested in supporting the inclusion process within their centres and in the larger community. We meet the last Monday of each month from 9:00 to 11:00 AM at NSCECE.

A CYCLE OF INQUIRY: COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

A community of practice for early childhood educators interested in investigating their work together. The group uses various protocols, research questions, examination of documentation, and critical friends processes to develop skills and understanding about teaching, and learning in the early years. This group will interest those using shared inquiry or an emergent approach to curriculum development. The group meets occasional Saturdays from 1:30 to 3:30 PM. With enough interest a weekday group will be established.

FOR INFORMATION
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Resource Centre services are offered with support from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood Education Training Initiative.



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Participants at the Inspirations and Provocations: Values in Practice Panel enjoyed a relaxing evening. Fifty people had a chance to share, talk and be inspired by practices in early years programs from around the world. (NSCECE, November 2014)

At the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education, we provide an opportunity for students to study and gain experience in Early Childhood Education through a diverse range of courses and practical settings.

We are proud to lay a foundation for the personal and professional growth and development of our students. It is our hope and goal that NSCECE graduates continue to learn, practice and reflect throughout their years in early childhood education.



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Resources for the early childhood community



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Work With Children to Reduce Transition Chaos

Carrie Melsom

Daily routines and transitions lie at the heart of our programs. It is in these everyday encounters and interactions that the true quality of what we offer children and families is revealed. One of the most common mistakes we make as educators is to forget that children can be our allies during transitions. To make children allies we must remember to consider their needs and work with their emerging strengths and skills. We sow the seeds of chaos when “hurry up and wait” is our primary approach to group management. This power over, power-on-through method does not take into account the developmental and learning needs of children. It does not respect individuals and does nothing to build capacity or skill in the child or the group. Yet even when transitions are not working and we see children and feel ourselves becoming more stressed and overwhelmed with each passing day, we persist, often becoming more rigid and

inflexible in an attempt to make sure the children know we mean business and that they had better shape up.



If you are dreading a particular daily transition it is time to stop what you are doing, check in with your team, and start investigating so that you understand the challenges and can make a new plan. The children are not going to be able to make it better for you. The issue is never your “bad” children; the issue is always that your plan for this time of the day is not working!

There are many things to consider when designing transitions for groups of children. You may want to start by reviewing

what you know about planning for transitions. The books highlighted in this newsletter may also be helpful. There are many resources on-line. You can start with some of the following. The Center for Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning has a workshop kit on this topic <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/kits/wwbtk4.pdf>; Beyond the Journal has an NAEYC article on *Planning Transitions to Prevent Challenging Behaviour*, http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200805/pdf/BTJ_Hemmeter_Transitions.pdf; a scholarly article discusses the ages and stages of learning to follow directions <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/ages-stages-learning-follow-directions>; and for those who recognize the power of signing to help regulate and support children I recommend you visit the Southern Early Childhood site to look for their resource on using singing to smooth classroom transitions. For those who like to talk and share ideas NSCECE is offering a workshop on planning transitions January 20, 2015.