Transitions: making schools ready for young children and families

Slides that can be used in trainings provided that correct reference

PROBLEM?

Transitions

Transitioning from one educational environment to the other

>> Can bring exciting experiences

>> Yet also creates stress and fear

Transition is easier when difference between known and unknown is less in

physical and social environment

For many children the unknown prevails in the formal (pre)school environment
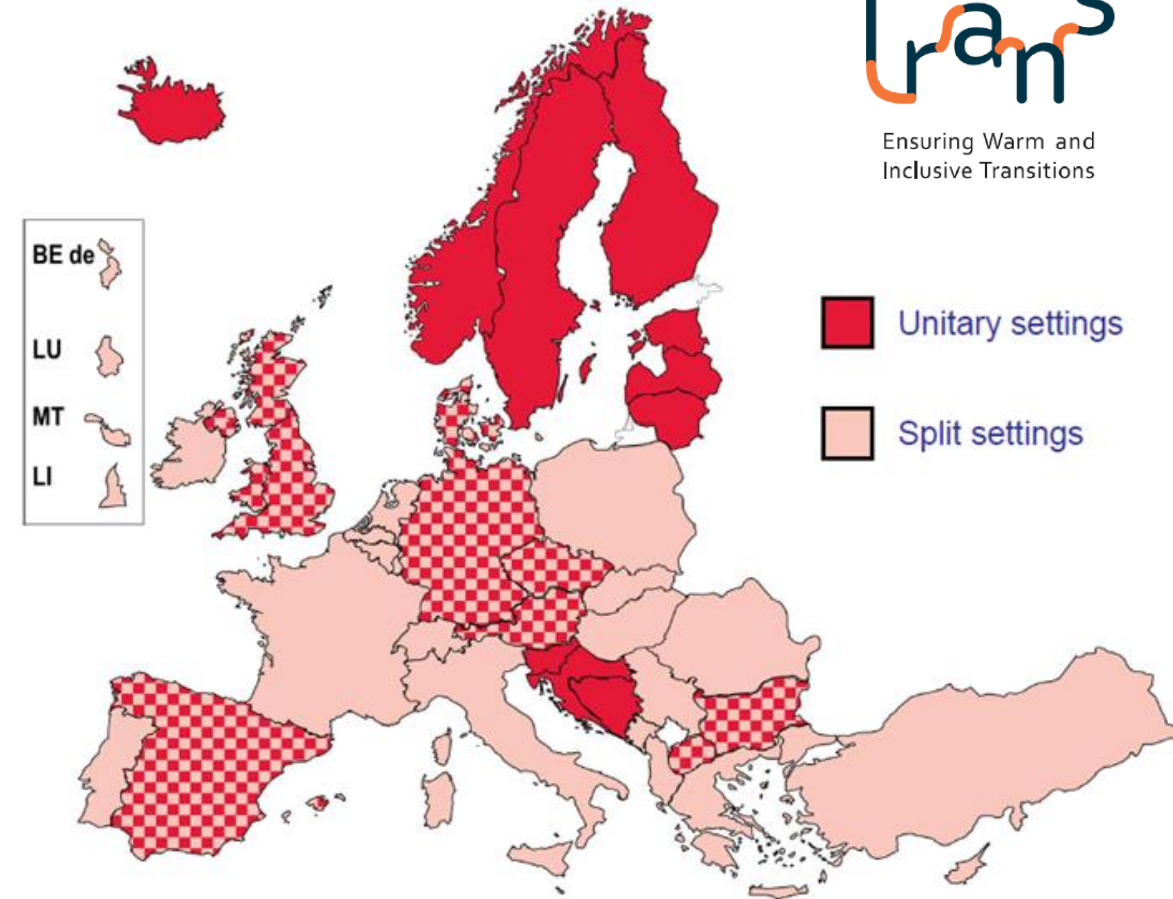
Constructed Transitions

Institutional splits:

Early Childhood Education and Care

(ECEC) split systems

Between ECEC and

Compulsary School Education (CSE)

Be: 2,5 year   Uk: 4 year   Sl: 1-6 year   It: 6 year

Organisation of centre-based ECEC, 2016/17

BE de
LU
MT
LI

Unitary settings

Split settings

Source: Eurydice.

Common Concern

Voices of children, families and staff

Not every child experiences a positive transition

⬇

How to cope with these unequal transitions?

Context: lack of problem ownership & thoughtful pedagogy

⬇

Children are not ready to learn /go to school?

Children are not yet ready to learn?

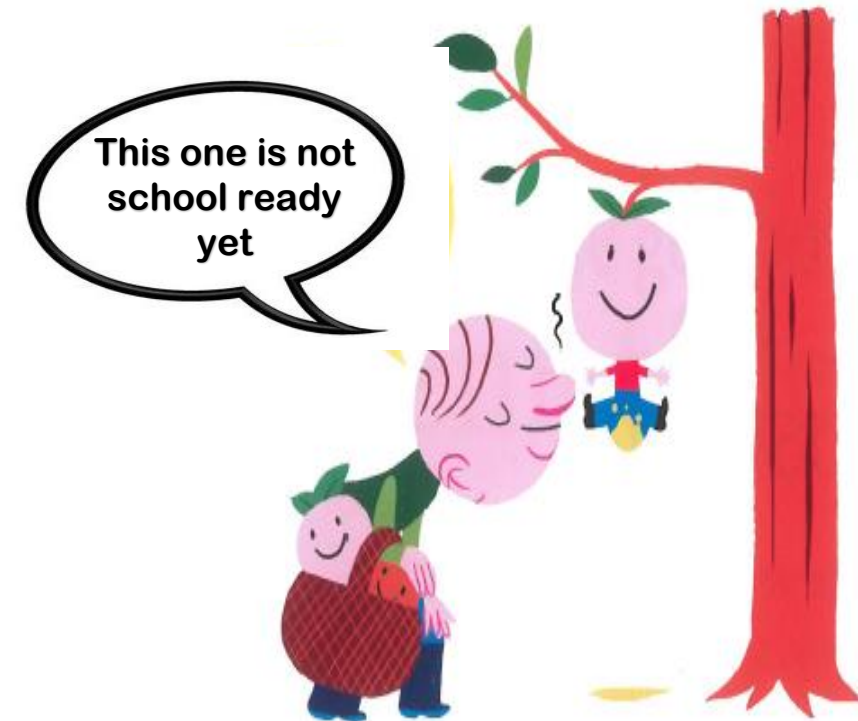Being autonomous in physical and emotional caring needs

Not speaking dominant school language enough

Difficulties to get along with other children

'Flitting' behaviour ('*vlinderen'*)

'Anarchism' in school system

Image of children as incompetent novices

Making children school ready

"...the social and emotional foundation skills to progress in speech, perception, ability to understand numbers and quantities, motor skills, attitude to work, concentration, memory and social conduct; having the ability to engage positively and without aggression with other children and the ability to respond appropriately to requests from teachers" *(Allen, 2011)*
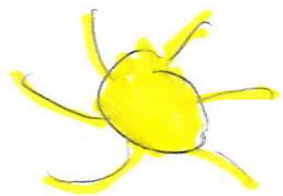
School readiness as policy and practice vacuum

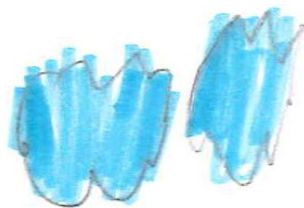Make them school ready in what exactly? → School readiness as skill acquisition

Who needs to make them school ready? → Responsabilisation of parents and/or ECEC staff

→ Confirms or enhances existing social inequalities!

ALLA SCUOLA DELL'INFANZIA

ALLA SCUOLA PRIMARIA

GIOCAVO, COLORAVO, DISEGNAVO, MI DIVERTIVO

I was playing, coloring, drawing, having fun (Elena 6 yrs old)

I write, read, study and carry out homeworks

ALLA SCUOLA DELL'INFANZIA

ALLA SCUOLA PRIMARIA

GIOCAVO CON I MIEI AMICI

STIAMO ASCOLTANDO LA MAESTRA

I was playing with my friends (Fatima 6 years old)

We are listening to the teacher

Childrens' voices

Discontinuity in learning environment , rules and expectation

> Space: universally, rigidly defined indoor space / more open, flexible organisation

> Learning environment: more adult-directed learning / child–directed learning throug

> Relational agency: confidence & independency / more passive compliant role

The older children become, more unidirectional learning occurs: risk that children lose a sense of control over their learning

How to balance this and find more common ground so a diversity of children have rich meaningfull learning experiences?

Parents' voices

Importance of learning, socialisation, civil coexistence, making friends, caring,…

"I hope that my daughter will find a positive, collaborative and stimulating environment that supports her in her growth as a student and as a person" (It)

Complex position : adopting ànd challenging dominant readying practices / ideas

Parents' voices

Irrespective of age, context and system, questions on care, emotional safety and inclusion!

"There are too many children in preschool, you can not have everyone under control, so somebody can do him harm."(Sl)

"My child cried from September till the Easter holidays in April. He clamped himself to me. The teachers pulled him away from my arms because he did not want let me go. You are helpless as parent. Saying goodbye at the school gate is difficult. A separation like this breaks my heart, and I think that it is a very traumatic experience for my child." (Be)

Main reason why (societally disadvantaged) parents tend to distrust schools

Parents' voices

Request for more communication with teacher of their child

"Well I don't know whether he has eaten in primary school, I don't know whether he has had a good day, bad day, don't know what kind of mood he is going to be in, don't know anything!...The preschool was more relaxed...more friendly and welcoming... Now, you have to stand in the playground, you have to stand outside. The children come out one by one, go straight to the parents and then you leave so you don't even get to talk to a teacher or find out anything...The only place you can go into is the office of the principal, which always seems to be locked." (UK)

Professional voices

Top down pressure – reaching goals curriculum – what come's next?

Not knowing child, family and local communities enough

The younger children are, more chance for unfavourable working conditions

Differences in professional identity and recognition of ECEC and CSE staff

"Who am I to say something to the teachers. They have their expertise. I'm a childcare worker and know more about caring issues." (Be)

Recognised challenges in policies and research

Increased academic attention on transitions

School-ready children or children-ready schools?

Increased international policy attention from concern for social inequalities

OECD (2017): making schools ready for children instead of children ready for school develop a strong and equal partnership of ECEC and CSE

EU (2009; 2011; 2015, 2018): smooth transitions between different levels of education

UNESCO (2010): importance of educational continuity, grounded on shared pedagogical principles that start from a holistic development of children

WHAT DID WE DO?

4 pilots on warm and inclusive transitions

UK (Corby):
- Pen Green Centre & Research Base
- Rockingham Primary
- Our Lady of Walsingham

Belgium (Ghent & Aalst):
- VBJK, Centre for Innovations in the Early Years
- Mezennestje childcare centre
- Sint Maarten pre- and primary school
- Mensen voor Mensen, poverty advocacy group

Slovenia (Lubjana & Tisina):
- Educational Research Institute
- OS Tisina pre- and primary school

Italia (RER):
- Bologna University
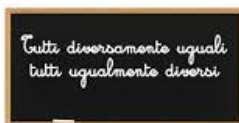- DD Vignola pre- and primary school

Many children, families, staff, researchers involved

Inter-institutional professional learning communities

Group of staff from different institutions (childcare, preschool, ECEC centre and/or primary school) sharing and critically interrogating their transitional practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way.

Vision and actions go hand in hand

    Reseach perspectives of children and parents

    Discuss child images and children's ways of learning, relationship parents-school

    through visits, observations, case discussions

Engage in boundary work and relational competences

Facilitated by pedagogical coach and/or researcher

Children and parent's as focal points

Listening to children / parent's as experts of their own lives
Good continuous relationships as key

Towards a rich competent child image

Enriching natural care and learning processes of children

Exploration urge /drive

'Fitting' instead of 'flitting' behaviour

In(ter)dependency

Anticipating change with children & families

Relationships and connections as a key in sustaining children to face changes and challenges of settling in

Making space for the newcomers in the class

Creating play and meeting places for children, families and communities who did not attend ECEC beforehand

Organising outreach activities in local communities in order to built trust and dialogue on what matters to them

Enabling access to (pre)school by breaking down barriers

Establishing warm welcome policies

Flexible and customised familiarisation trajectories in ECEC ànd primary school

Teachers and childcarers

    are the most important 'go to person' for parents

    learned to listen to the parents rather than talking to them (openness for educare)

    have a key role in developing relationships with children and parents in transitions

"For parents it can take 6 to 8 weeks to find their way, not knowing who you can go to and probably thinking 'I'm not being neurotic, I'm not being awkward. just want somebody to go to help me as a parent to make those relationships.' I think those are really important things" (UK)

MAIN CHANGES

Positive experiences for children and parents

Increased well being and learning opportunities of children

Less emotional stress in transition for children, families ànd staff

Attendance rates increased

Belonging to an educational community

"I had another child who attended the school some years ago. I saw the difference... everything was smoother, no child was crying, we had enough time to prepare the child but also our selves" (It)

Shared responsibility and problem ownership

"We feel that the project has connected us more. Previously, it almost felt like we were part of two separate institutions, even if formally we belong to the same one. Quite a few teachers from the primary school went to observe practice in the preschool and reflected together on the observation afterwards. I think that this was one of the best collaborations achieved. We were all positively surprised and enthusiastic about the dynamics of groups or classes and about the work of our colleagues." (SI)

Aha erliebenis

From incompetent novice to competent children

Why are we looking so differently towards the same children and parents?

Confrontation: thinking out of the (institutionalised and cultural) box

Competence: support from colleagues

Institutional transitions: from problemacy to opportunity!

'Making' children (pre-)school ready becomes an irrelevant topic