Blog

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Disrupted Transitions in Early Childhood Education – Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

Vygotsky (1998) argued for recognition of the agentic nature of childhood. Children create their own learning experiences through their engagement with their surroundings and the people in their environments. Through their engagement with natural places and spaces of life, play and learning they experience conditions that create a need to adapt or change their responses, we call these natural transitions. These experiences may at times be challenging and cause a sense of disruption. At these times children turn to the people in their environment who they trust to support them. Transitions can be planned for and higher levels of support can be identified to make these transitions safe and secure for the child.

Since early Spring 2020, early years educators have been challenged to utilise emergency pedagogical approaches to ensure the effective provision and stability of early childhood education. COVID-19 is a 'black swan' event for education and may have long lasting implications for the early education community across the globe. In typical circumstances, Irish children experience a myriad of educational transitions, however the consequences of the global pandemic have created uncertain and disruptive transitions for children, families and early education professionals. Some families have experienced their own private crises, such as a bereavement or loss of employment. Some support structures within the family system have been interrupted by restrictions on community. The lack of routine in; attending crèche or pre-school, visiting grandparents, going on play dates, playing sport has created a new real-world experience for young children and their families. These new experiences can create tensions and emotional moments that will have an impact on the wellbeing of the family as a system and their children (Hedegaard, 2014).

Research highlights the vital importance of natural transitions in the lives of young children. Ackesjö (2013) argues that at times of transition children must interpret and negotiate both the old and the new arena as they construct their identity in the new setting. An important aspect of transition for young children is developing a sense of belonging in the new setting. Many questions remain, including the turbulent nature of multiple transitions children have endured in response to this crisis, what role does the early childhood educator play in facilitating and supporting children during these multiple transitions?
Additionally, have the dynamics of relationship, identity construction and resilience building for children changed forever and finally the legacy of social distancing in relation to direct and close contact by both early childhood educators and families. Transitions are ameliorated by the child's experience, from birth onwards, of dependable, stable, continuous, and affectionate relationships (Keinig,2002).
A serious rupture has emerged for families of children with additional needs. Their additional support systems in extended family and community-based interventions stopped abruptly. These children and their families were suddenly experiencing a transition like no other. Their daily practices, everyday routines and activities were severely interrupted. For children and families with additional needs, relationship, with consistent support systems, matters significantly and enables them to function and maintain their unique identity as a family.

The demands placed on children during these unsettling early educational transitions can present strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and the degree of success experienced can impact on children in many ways. A successful transition can have long-term positive outcomes for children both in their educational success and in terms of social and emotional development (Margetts, 2009; Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO), 2010).

The 'new' world post COVID-19 must empower early childhood educators to deepen their understanding of and encourage a discourse related to supporting resilience in managing disruptive transitions for children and to assist in the development of sophisticated problem-solving skills. The purpose of this short blog is to draw professional conversations from practitioners, researchers and families about family and child transitions during and post Covid 19. We want to know how we can support and protect families in maintaining their own unique system and identities.

References

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