

reflections

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INVISIBLE TRANSITIONS: A BIRTH TO THREE-YEAR-OLD PERSPECTIVE

Anna Russell, Rebecca Sabo and Nicole Pilsworth, Gowrie Victoria

In our previous article – Reflections Issue 8 2017, we looked at the collaborative partnerships that support transition to school between the kindergarten classes at Gowrie Victoria's Broadmeadows Valley Children's Program and the co-located Broadmeadows Valley Primary School. We now invite you to shift your focus to how we embed 'Invisible Transitions' in our younger children's programs.

Since we opened our doors at Broadmeadows Valley in January 2016, 'building strong connections' has been a key learning focus across all our educational programs. From our youngest students we build a strong sense of community using a range of strategies. Children as young as six months old sit and share dining experiences with three and four-year-old children; children of all ages share garden spaces and are invited into each other's learning spaces. Across our programs it's common to sit and enjoy a group time where a four-year-old will be

sitting next to a one-year-old, who will be sitting next to a three-year-old. We value the skills of all children and feel that each child has something to learn from and teach each other; this is especially true when planning for our birth to three-year-olds.

It is commonly understood that the vast majority of brain development occurs in the first three years of life. With this in mind, our aim is to facilitate learning during these pivotal moments and build the brain to be wired ready for school and lifelong learning. What we mean by this is definitely not a push down of school-like expectations or activities. What we focus on in the first three years of a child's life supports the development of a strong sense of identity and well-being through their connections. Through engagement in early learning experiences each young learner develops a positive attitude to learning. We use all aspects of our curriculum to embed opportunities for teaching and learning.

Examples of this include:

Routines

Through a focus on emotional expression we empower children from a very young age to be confident in their self-regulatory skills. Children are supported to engage in conversations and experiences that involve an element of risk and teach children strategies for responding to situations that may not always go according to plan. With our very young learners we establish structure within our inquiry based curriculum. This includes predictable routines that children are actively encouraged to participate in and lead. Through these routines children are able to organise their actions and ideas.

Responsiveness

Through a rich language based approach to education with all our learners we focus on establishing skills from a very young age where children are able to ask and respond so that their own needs can be met. We strongly promote the children's awareness and responsiveness to the needs of their peers; establishing a strong sense of trust and civic responsibility. By empowering children to be expressive and responsive we are able to develop a secure sense of self within the children and a keen ability to explore individuality within learning approaches.

Visibility

We involve our youngest learners in regular excursions into the school grounds. The purpose of these excursions is to ensure children have a strong understanding of all aspects of school life; focusing on the sights and smells. Children are encouraged to explore the challenges of a space not designed for us. We focus on making school 'ordinary' and not a special event. Through long term exposure we hope to ensure all children feel informed and empowered long before their first year of school. We practice the practical skills every day with the aim of reducing future stress and demystifying school.

The benefits of Invisible Transition for younger children

Parent perspective:

'Yes, I think Asher is benefitting from exposure to school. He has talked about watching the older children play, especially on the oval. When there has been interaction

with the school kids, it has helped not only with his ball skills, but his confidence in approaching and speaking to children of different ages.' Asher's mum, Kate

Teacher perspective:

'When we think about empowering our learners to be proficient in transition skills; it's everything, every day! What is transition? It's change. What do we need to be ready for change? It's relationships; it's trust, it's experimentation, it's appropriate. This is the time when we need to future proof the brain, fill it with all the things it will need throughout its life. If we start this when the child is four years or five-years-old, we've missed the boat!' Anna Russell, Early Childhood Teacher

With our birth to three-year-old learners we have seen that through an 'invisible' approach to transitions we are creating confident and capable young people who have a very strong sense of self and community. Children are truly connected to each other as well as their learning experience.

At Gowrie Broadmeadows we know we have it easier than some, we have a school in our backyard! But, there are some simple actions any educator can take to teach the same skills.

Practical ways that birth to three-year-olds engage in Invisible Transitions:

- Encourage children to bring their own water bottle and to take responsibility for it.
- Encourage children to carry their own back packs.
- Teach children to make their own beds, encourage autonomy during meal times, and wash their own dishes or fold washing.
- Incorporate adult size furniture into the program.
- Engage in individual and small group activities facilitated by an educator; reading books/numeracy activities, for example, counting plates or cups.
- Engage in regular local walking excursions; exploring sights, smells and perhaps even the tastes of your community.

By focusing on Invisible Transitions with our youngest learners, we have learnt that it is *everything – every day!* We've learnt that in order to design a 'school ready' brain we need to actively teach it in the first three years. When we do this we set children up for success in kindergarten, school and a life of learning.

For your professional learning and support contact your state based Gowrie listed below:

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