

# Reciprocal Visits: Strengthening Relationships for Transition

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# Session overview

- Context – Transition to School
- Why support Reciprocal Visits?
- Project overview
  - Objectives
  - Methodology
  - Evaluation
- Project outcomes
- How to implement in your networks



## Context: The Transition to School Initiative

- Importance of positive transitions for children is well established in the research
  - Impact on engagement and later learning
- Transition initiative introduced in 2009, part of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) for children birth to 8 years
  - Transition Learning and Development Statement
  - Resource Kit
  - Targeted projects to support improved transition outcomes
- Statements and Resource Kit currently being revised and strengthened on the basis of new evidence

# The Transition to School Initiative

- Resource Kit
- Transition Learning and Development Statement
- These are important... but they're not the whole story



- **What makes the difference?**

## Promising practices in transition...

- Reciprocal visits for children
- Reciprocal visits for educators
- Transition statements and meetings
- Joint professional development
- Local transition networks
- Buddy programs
- Family involvement
- Learning programs responsive to children
- Social story-boards
- Community-level transition timetable



# Why do we need to support Reciprocal Visits?

- Research into Practices to Support a Positive Start to School
  - Identified and explored three of the ‘promising practices’ in transition, including **shared pedagogical perspectives and reciprocal visiting** between early childhood and school
- 2015 – Report on Education Transitions by the Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO)
  - More opportunities needed to bring educators in early childhood and schools to a shared understanding of the roles of the two sectors
- 2015 – Consultation on Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative
  - Found that opportunities to meet and share information, including reciprocal visits between schools and prior to school settings, were associated with enhancing current transition practices
  - Recommended fostering opportunities for prior to school and school personnel to develop relationships that enable open communication about children transitioning to school

- Why do we need to support Reciprocal Visits?

***“The rich relationships between early childhood and school teachers developed through a reciprocal visiting program, or through other means, can have a positive effect on children’s social competence and has been linked to fewer behavioural problems”***  
*(LoCasale-Crouch et al. 2008).*



# The Supporting Reciprocal Visits Project

Commissioned by the Department of Education and Training

Facilitated by Monash University and  
Semann & Slattery/Macquarie University, 2014-15



# Project objectives

- Increase understanding of curriculum design, planning and implementation including content, pedagogy, assessment, feedback and reporting through shared professional learning as part of reciprocal visits
  - Support stronger relationships around children's transitioning to school between educators and children and their families
  - Engender a new understanding and respect between early childhood and school educators about the work that they each do to support children's learning
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- **Developing 'Relational Agency'**

# Developing relational agency

- Professionals have relational agency when they:
  - attune themselves to others
  - build common knowledge across the partnership or network
  - set agreed goals
  - clearly understand strategies for effective implementation.
- Members of the multidisciplinary teams are then able to:
  - take the standpoint of the other
  - be explicit about what matters, as well as recognise what matters to others
  - attune ones actions with those of others.

# Relational Agency Framework

Phases	Key idea
Foundational	Building a sense of belonging to a network
Phase 1	Finding out about each other's services
Phase 2	Engaging in a common experience or process
Phase 3	Building a common focus for the group
Phase 4	Building a common language
Phase 5	Aligning one's own interpretation with that of others
Phase 6	Thinking about one's own professional expertise and contribution in relation to what others with different disciplinary/community knowledge and practice bring
Phase 7	Enhanced professional practice where one's own contributions are viewed as part of the collectively identified professional inquiry or need

- **What we did: Project overview**

Monash University	Semann & Slattery and Macquarie University
<p><b>Banyan Fields</b></p> <p>1 primary school 2 early childhood services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Integrated</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Tarneit</b></p> <p>1 P-9 school 2 early childhood services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>High growth</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Puckapunyal</b></p> <p>1 primary school 2 early childhood services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>High mobility</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Bendigo</b></p> <p>1 primary school 3 early childhood services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Low growth</i></li> </ul>

**Involved Principals, Prep Teachers, Centre Directors, Early Childhood Educators from each setting**

- **Methodology – sessions 1-5**

	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Key questions</b>
<b>Session 1</b>	Setting the scene Relationship building	Introduction to reciprocal visits Overview of current research	What do we want to get out of the program? What does the research say about transitions?
<b>Session 2</b>	What do we know about transition from an early childhood perspective?	Early childhood teachers provide overview of current practice. Requirements (legislative and practical) for early childhood settings explained.	What is currently being done by early childhood teachers?
<b>Session 3</b>	What do we know about transition from a school perspective?	School teachers provide overview of current practice. Requirements and expectations of school teachers clearly explained.	What is currently being done by school teachers?
<b>Session 4</b>	Reciprocal visit #1	School teachers observe early childhood classrooms and vice-versa.	
<b>Session 5</b>	Reflection session #1	Post-reciprocal visit reflection on learnings practices.	What can we learn from early childhood settings? How can we apply it to a school situation? What can we learn from school settings? How can we apply it to an early childhood situation?

- **Methodology – sessions 6-10**

	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Key questions</b>
<b>Session 6</b>	Reciprocal visit #2	Collaborative teaching in early childhood setting	
<b>Session 7</b>	Reflection session #2	Post-reciprocal visit reflection on early learning centre practices	How does the early childhood pedagogy and curriculum differ from schools, and how can it be adapted to support continuity of learning?
<b>Session 8</b>	Reciprocal visit #3	Collaborative teaching in school setting	
<b>Session 9</b>	Reflection session #3	<p>Post-reciprocal visit reflection on school practices.</p> <p>Discussion of Transition of information including how to best utilise the Transition Statements</p> <p>Initial development of action plan</p>	<p>How can the Transition Statement assist and how do teachers want to use it?</p> <p>What strategies can be developed to support transition?</p>
<b>Session 10</b>	Project evaluation and action plan	<p>Development of action plan</p> <p>Project evaluation</p>	How can we ensure a more successful transition for our children?

# Methodology

- In documenting project outcomes, facilitators used a case study approach, qualitative data collection
- Sessions were structured around building relational agency
- Videos also taken during reciprocal visits and reflection sessions

# Evaluating project outcomes

- What were relationships like at the start?
- What was the level of shared understanding and true collaboration?
- What did the journey look like?
  
- What **difference** did it make?
  
  
- Facilitators used the Relational Agency Framework to better understand the relationships developed by participants over time and as a tool to gauge educational change.

# Project outcomes

- The outcomes included:
  - shared knowledge and a deeper understanding of pedagogy, language, environments and local situations;
  - re-appraisal of current practices in the context of shared priorities for children and families;
  - the identification of strengths and differences across sector affiliations;
  - shared events and the opportunity to contribute to community activities; and
  - action plans to support ongoing opportunities to continue the project.
- Video –Banyan Fields
- <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/transtoschoolreciprocalvisits.aspx>
- Videos of each of the other sites are also available on the website.

# How to implement in your networks

- Anyone can do it, BUT...
- Critical success factors to consider:
  - a clear plan for fostering and maintaining a partnership
  - prioritising resources for joint professional development
  - using workshop topics of mutual interest that have a direct link back to improving outcomes for children and families as they transition from one setting to another
  - engaging an external facilitator with appropriate expertise
  - supporting educators to take time to critically reflect upon the professional learning sessions and how this might influence their practice
  - developing an action plan following the joint professional development sessions and reciprocal visits to facilitate ongoing successful transitions
  - LEADERSHIP....

# How to implement in your networks

- Challenges:
  - Continuity of staff during and after the project
  - Schools with large numbers of ‘feeder’ early childhood services
  - Time pressures
  - Keeping up the momentum
  - Linking with Outside School Hours Care – key partners in transition
- Building relationships takes time...
  - Start with small, achievable steps
  - Be flexible
  - Have patience and persistence!

## per·sist·ence

[per-sis-tuhns, -zis-]

*noun*, to continue steadfastly or firmly in some state, purpose, course of action, or the like, especially in spite of opposition, remonstrance, etc.

**It means: progress, not perfection.**

# How to implement in your networks

- DET website has some useful resources, including reports, videos and a sample session plan:  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/transtoschoolreciprocalvisits.aspx>



# THANK YOU

## Questions?

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