

The Rhode Island Early Childhood Newsletter



The Kindergarten Train Is Pulling Out of the Station, but Your Five-Year-Old Is Digging in Her Heels...Tips for Making the "Train"-sition to Kindergarten Fun!

by Mary Scott Hackman

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It can be a huge transition for children once a parent enrolls them in a child care program. Every parent hopes their child will thrive in their new surroundings. Over time, parents observe the growing abilities of their preschooler as her scribbles become words and stick figures turn into lovely, detailed renderings. Soon, she progresses into an amazingly confident and capable young person. At just about this time, another huge change looms: the announcement that school is registering children for kindergarten!

Your child has watched as the "big" kids gather to wait for the bus that takes them to school. Of course, she is eager to be a part of that cohort...*or is she?* As the summer approaches—a few months before kindergarten begins—parents and teachers may see a change in their preschoolers' behavior. Suddenly, their bright and eager students turn sulky, tearful, and sometimes bullying. They may show signs of regressing: sucking their thumbs or having "accidents" when they've been toilet trained for years!

Some child care programs have "bridging" ceremonies for the children who will move on to kindergarten. These celebrations come after several months of preparation. As parents and/or teachers, we want children to know that we recognize this big step in their lives, so structure a "look back" at other milestones (e.g. when your child first learned to walk, to talk, to make their first pictures). Compare that to where they are now, and celebrate with them in what is ahead.

Here are other suggestions parents can do to make this transition feel exciting for both of you. Remember, the more *you* feel prepared, the more your child will feel secure.

+ Listen to your child; make yourself available to hear their concerns about the big changes ahead. You can do this by engaging in conversation or in reading books about school. (Editor's note: See the Internet version of this article for a great book list.)

+ Visit her new classroom. Try going at least two times: once when the current kindergarteners are in the classroom and once when they are not there. (Some parents even ride the school bus with their child before they do that on their own).

+ Find out which children in your neighborhood are going to your child's school and have one or two over for a play date. (Invite their current friends over, too!)

+ When putting your child on the bus, encourage her by saying, "Have a great day!" rather than, "You be good!"

+ Introduce your child to the idea that a new classroom will have new rules, and make a list with your child of the possible rules she might have to follow in her new classroom.

+ It helps to prepare your child the night before by setting out her clothes—your choice along with her choice—and talk about what she might have for lunch.

+ Include her name and address on any of her belongings...especially her backpack.

+ Write a note and place it in an agreed-upon pocket of her backpack or jacket. It will remind her that you are thinking of her throughout the day.

+ Once your child is in school, create a special time to talk about her day, either at dinner or before bedtime. Sometimes important information is shared at these times. Ask your child, "What was fun?" or "What was not fun?"

Finally, know that with any change your child is sure to experience a little fear; this emotion is natural. Sometimes making a list of all that your child is feeling the night before and then comparing it to what she feels after her first day of school will truly show her how life can change when the unfamiliar becomes familiar. In doing so, she will learn one of life's greatest lessons: "We can have fear, but we are not our fear." (Palmer Parker, *The Courage to Teach*)

Letter from the Editor

Welcome back, readers, to the last issue of Volume 18 of this newsletter. As we wrap up the theme of *transitions*, I find myself thinking of the last lyric in the song "Closing Time" by Semisonic: "Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end."

Those lyrics parallel my feelings about creating these past four issues: accomplished, complete, eager, and expectant. I hope you have found this quartet of issues useful for your professional work. Our new transition/journey will begin in September, when Volume 19's first issue becomes available; its theme will be *leadership*.

I wanted to intentionally focus on preschoolers in this last issue, as this age group will be shortly experiencing a very new transition: kindergarten. The lead article, written in a playful style, offers hands-on strategies for what a parent or adult can do to make this new transition as fun and stress-free as possible for four- and five-year-olds.

It is always helpful to have support from resources, so I enjoyed that the lead article highlights a wonderful list of children's literature about going to kindergarten. Please also enjoy the children's literature reviews inside. The Internet, too, offered me great information in the form of a comprehensive web site about adults' roles in kindergarten transition. Further exploration on the Internet yielded a wonderful article from Redleaf Press's web site about how to use participatory songs to create smoother transitions. I want to thank the author for allowing me to reprint her useful article.

Are there any leaders in our field that would care to share their first-person account of their path to leadership or an article with ties to leadership? Have you ever wanted to review children's literature or professional development resources, or want to share a great web site on leadership? If so, then please contact me. My phone number is (401) 721-6404.

Summer has arrived and is proving very generous: longer nights to relax, restore, and even read by natural light! Until September...

Joseph Morra, Editor

Statewide and National Calendar of Professional Development Opportunities

Thursday - Friday, June 28 - 29, 2007

CHILDSPAN, Pawtucket
CHILDSPAN's Three-part
Workshop Series:
*Working with Children with
Challenging Behaviors*
Contact Jessica Baéz: (401) 721-6401

Fridays, July 13 - August 17, 2007

RI Community Food Bank, Providence
Mini-Course:
B.E.S.T. Youth Worker Training
Contact Sarah.cahill@afterschoolri.org
for more information.

Thursday - Saturday,
July 26 - 28, 2007

Community College of Rhode Island,
Warwick Campus
**2007 RI Early Childhood
Summer Institute:**
*Early Childhood Mental Health:
Models, Methods, and Communication
Strategies for Supporting
Children and Families*
Contact Clarissa M. Uttley:
(401) 874-4036

Saturday, September 15, 2007

Quonset O' Club, North Kingstown
Family Child Care Homes of
Rhode Island Inc.'s
Annual Conference:
*Giving Back: Teaching Children the
Value of Community*
Contact Jenniseri@yahoo.com
for more information.

Friday, September 28, 2007

Amica Headquarters, Lincoln
CHILDSPAN's 4th Annual
Advanced Leadership Institute:
*Moving Our State Forward:
Systems to Support Professional
Development, Intentional Teaching,
and Research-Based Practice*
Contact Jessica Baéz: (401) 721-6401

CHILDSPAN News by Shevaun Keogh-Walker

With the spring season coming to a close, CHILDSPAN staff are beginning to look ahead to the summer and fall and the professional development opportunities that we will be able to provide for all of you. Although CHILDSPAN's Spring Training Calendar offers training into June, the staff at CHILDSPAN have been working hard to provide you with a variety of options as we look ahead.

This summer, CHILDSPAN will be hosting a three-part series for Rhode Island Teacher Assistants as well as other interested participants. This series, *Working with Children with Challenging Behaviors*, will be presented by the dynamic Jeanine Fitzgerald and will address the unique patterns of influences upon a child's behavior and development including attachment, internal working models, and temperament. This series will also provide Teacher Assistants with strategies for working with children who may have been described as "explosive, spirited, sensitive, defiant, angry, or withdrawn" so that each child may find her/his path to success.

As a "kick-off" to the fall, CHILDSPAN will be presenting *Moving Our State Forward: Systems to Promote Professional Development, Intentional Teaching, and Research-Based Practice*, our fourth annual Advanced Leadership Institute. This professional development opportunity, held at Amica Headquarters in Lincoln, is for highly experienced staff and will be presented as a full-day cohort model. Each participant will choose one daylong topic to explore with colleagues throughout the day. Opportunities for networking will be available during lunch.

CHILDSPAN staff are also expanding *Pathways to Quality*, our fee-for-service program. We are providing technical assistance to programs toward program excellence, on-site training, and accreditation support. These services are available for family child care, early childhood, and school-age and youth programs. Please call Cynthia Roberts at (401) 721-6408 with any questions regarding this expanded service.

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A Special Journey *by Michele Cameron*

In the September 2006 issue of this newsletter, an article entitled “Transition Is a Journey” described children beginning a new stage in their lifecycle: child care. This article eloquently described the process we all undergo when facing new life experiences. Using the structure of that article, this author will provide suggestions for parents of children with special needs who may be facing this “new stage” in the lifecycle.

Transition Is a Journey

Each individual’s experience in becoming a parent is unique, and the “amount of time, preparation, and planning” can vary. For some it may be the length of time between conception and delivery, while for others it may include an application process and home studies toward foster care and/or adoption. Despite the timeframe, most parents have the opportunity to get ready for this new role and begin the dream of what her/his child will be like.

A common wish is for a “healthy” child. So what will happen when a parent learns that her/his child has a disability or special need?

Letting Go Stage

Parents of children with a special need agree that there is a process of grief over the lost dream for her/his child. There may be a range of feelings: shock, denial, guilt, and sadness. There is no time limit for this process, but parents will benefit from knowing there are friends and family that understand and will listen.

Uncertainty Stage

When life turns down a road that is new and unknown, it can be daunting. Parents of children with a special need express that there is a growth curve as they learn about their child’s needs. A parent begins to be opened to a new world of people and services that they never had before.

Taking Hold Stage

With a better understanding of her/his child’s needs and with continuous support of family, friends, and professionals, a parent becomes better prepared to embrace

the triumphs and challenges of raising a child with a special need. Individuals working with these parents can be most supportive by learning about the child’s individual needs and helping to make adaptations to typical settings and activities.

One program that can help families with a child with special needs is Early Intervention (EI). EI is a statewide program that provides services to children, ages birth to three, who are experiencing developmental delays, have certain diagnosed conditions, or whose circumstances may result in significant developmental problems. EI is a voluntary program and anyone—parent/guardian, child care provider, medical professional, etc.—can refer a child by simply calling one of the EI providers.

There is a wide array of services that a child and family may receive in a variety of settings: at home, in child care, and in the community. Services are provided in “natural environments,” during play, typical routines and activities that allow the child to practice new skills. The family and the EI team determine together the plan and services that best meet each child’s needs. Services are provided at no cost to the family.

EI provides individualized services to families and children. Nonetheless, for all children, the goal is that they develop positive social relationships, acquire and use knowledge and skills, and take appropriate action to meet their needs. For families, the hope is that they will understand their children’s strengths, abilities, and special needs; understand their rights within the law and effectively communicate their children’s needs; help their children develop; experience ample social support; and access services and activities available to all families in their community.

Child care providers can assist the family by helping them understand early childhood development and by helping the family to identify their child’s strengths and areas of need. You can supply them information about EI, and either make the referral to EI yourself or with the family. Since EI works

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Early Childhood Resources in Rhode Island

Aquidneck Island Directors’ Association
Pam Griffiths, 683-0991

Child Care Support Network (CCSN)
Missy Deitrick, 222-5372

Children’s Friend and Service
Beth Sousa, 276-4336

*CHILDSPAN:
Rhode Island’s Child Development and
Education Training System*
Shevaun Keogh-Walker, 721-6400

*Family Child Care Homes of
Rhode Island, Inc. (FCCRI)*
Maria Belliard, 461-8908

Options for Working Parents
Julie Valladeres, 946-2300

Providence After School Alliance (PASA)
Elizabeth Devaney, 490-9599

Prevent Child Abuse Rhode Island (PCARI)
Katherine Begin, 728-7920

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP)
Joyce Butler, 490-9960

Rhode Island After School Plus Alliance
Sarah Cahill, 331-2869

*Rhode Island Association for the Education
of Young Children (RIAEYC)*
Jennifer DeFrance, 467-1219

*Rhode Island Child Care
Directors’ Association (RICCDA)*
Kim Maine, 294-3510

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
Elizabeth Burke Bryant, 351-9400

*Rhode Island School-Age Child Care
Association (RISCCA)*
Erica Saccoccio, 723-2277 x237

Rhode Island Head Start Association
Mary Nugent, 245-2833

*Rhode Island Head Start
Collaboration Project*
Lawrence Pucciarelli, 462-3071

*Rhode Island Parent
Information Network (RIPIN)*
Vivian Weisman, 727-4144

*URI, CE, Children, Youth,
and Family 4-H Program*
Marilyn Martin, 277-5255

Children's Literature Reviews

by Linda D'Ambra

Collard III, Sneed B. (2002). *Leaving Home*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

We all leave the "nest" sooner or later. This well designed and visually attractive picture book shows a variety of animals leaving home: jaguars leaving their mothers' side and learning to hunt alone, hawks migrating to warmer winter grounds, and spiders gliding on the wind to their new scampering grounds. This book has dual appeal for various age groups: The simple text on the top of the pages, paired with the pictures, will please preschoolers, while school-age children can read the longer, more informative text located at the bottom of the pages. (Ages 3 - 9)

Best, Cari. (1994). *Taxi! Taxi!* New York: Little, Brown, and Company.

Tina is growing up in a bilingual, single-parent household in an urban neighborhood. She wishes that her separated parents lived together so she could see her father every day. However, on Sundays, Tina's father, a taxi driver, picks her up—except when he is too busy—for their special time together. On this Sunday, the best Sunday ever, they visit a farm, have a picnic, and feed the ducks. Papi buys Tina a plant from a farm stand so she can grow tomatoes, as he does. Tina's love for both her parents and the excitement and vibrancy of her close-knit, city neighborhood comes through in this colorfully illustrated book, which incorporates many Spanish words and phrases. (Ages 4 - 8)

CHILDSPAN News

(continued from page two)

Although November may seem a long way off, we have already begun to plan the structure of the Keys to Quality Conference, which will be held on Saturday, November 3, 2007. Its theme will be *Creating Caring Communities*. As one of our largest conferences, we are excited to be able to provide a wide array of professional development offerings for all types of early care, school-age, and youth programs. Stay tuned for more information as the fall approaches!

It is exciting to develop and offer these new and innovative opportunities to meet the ever-changing and diverse needs of the Rhode Island community. We hope that you will take advantage of these varied forms of professional development. Have a great summer, and be sure to take some time to enjoy the long days and beautiful weather!

Professional Resource Review

by Karen Lambe

Paley, Vivian Gussin. (1986). *Mollie Is Three: Growing Up in School*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Vivian Gussin Paley, renowned teacher and writer, opens the door and welcomes us inside her classroom to follow Mollie between her 3rd and 4th birthday, as she plays in the doll corner, the block area, and at the story table. The conversations Mollie has with her peers—active, angry Frederick, or block-building Christopher, who does not know how to get anyone to play in his wonderfully constructed structures—are riveting. Mollie almost always finds deeper connections with these and other children as she develops into a child confident in her abilities to interest others in her play ideas.

Anyone working with very young children will immediately recognize the children's conversations author Paley records. The core of the preschool classroom is underscored in those interactions: that open-ended fantasy play is the most compelling attraction in the preschool curriculum. Paley reveals that focusing less on the disruption that play often brings, *and instead* on spending more time helping the children talk about the characters and plot of their play, improves the quality of children's play. Children become less disruptive as they engage more fully, while Paley learns to stop jumping in as quickly to solve problems.

The importance of listening—really *listening* to children—as they act out their constantly shifting stories is the message in *Mollie Is Three*.... Paley helps educators to remember to listen for "the sounds of reality." Tune in.

CHILDSPAN received a grant from the

Juanita Sanchez

Community Fund

to increase the Spanish-language resources in its professional lending library. The new resources focus on curriculum, social and emotional development, and high-quality learning environments.

To access these and the numerous other resources available in the library, please call Joseph Morra at (401) 721-6404.

Daily Transitions and Participatory Songs

by Nina Araújo, co-author of *Easy Songs for Smooth Transitions*

Joni and Jean are helping their preschool children get ready to go to the playground. They have their hands busy snapping coats and tying shoes before going outside on a cold fall day in New England. Their school's only access to the outdoors is through a long hallway. While waiting, a few children start pushing, another starts running around, and the teachers start to feel frustrated.

A few hours later, Joni and Jean help the children slow down before rest time. Joni and Jean often use the children's rest time to plan upcoming activities and classroom events. During their meeting, they discuss how frustrated they both feel by the challenging behaviors that often become more visible when the children lose direction and guidance from the adults in charge. This time, instead of planning upcoming activities, the teachers decide to spend the hour planning for transitions.

The next day, Joni and Jean invite the children to play a game while they put on outdoor clothes before going outside. They start singing "Join into the Game," inviting children to take turns making up gestures that will be part of the song. Unlike the previous day, the children are having fun while remaining focused on getting themselves ready to go outside, with minimal disruptive behavior.

As early childhood educators, we often take great pleasure in preparing "cool" activities or finding new books that will spark children's curiosity and attention. But how many of us plan for *the next transition*?

In a classroom, a *transition* is the time between two activities or routines during the day; for example, the time between free choice and circle time, or between snack and outdoor play. On average, in a full-day, group-care program, children and adults experience between sixteen and twenty transitions daily. At five to ten minutes per transition, up to three hours are spent in this manner each day. Transitions represent change—change in activity, energy level, space, and/or focus.

Change is difficult for all of us, but especially for young children. Transitions also offer great learning opportunities. Children can learn about prediction, difference, problem solving, inclusion, and how to smoothly and playfully shift focus.

Participatory songs can help make transitions smooth, fun, and educational. In order to be a part of a song, rather than just listening to it, children need to engage, pay attention, and contribute ideas, words, or gestures. As children become involved in a song, behavior issues diminish, words replace frustration, and the song becomes a problem-solving mechanism.

To engage children by using songs during transitions you need two basic ingredients: variety and complexity. For example, songs that can be sung for a whole year and sound different every time, or a wide selection of songs that stimulate children's brains, keeping them interested by providing new and progressively more complex patterns. Nursery rhymes and popular tunes can be a wonderful start. However, teachers also need to stretch beyond the familiar and increase their repertoire, in order to make their repertoire richer and more interesting to a diverse group of children.

Singing is one of the best things that we can do with children. From birth, babies are biologically primed to respond with pleasure to the human voice (Honig 1995). Notice the singsong way in which caregivers speak to infants, and how infants respond to it. Music reduces stress. It encourages us to use our whole body, it stimulates our mind, and it satisfies our emotions. It allows us to relax and be silly, and it invites us to be open to improvisation as it promotes physical and emotional closeness. Singing also helps build relationships; when we sing together, we feel like we belong together.

Some of you may wonder if I am suggesting that teachers sing all day long. Yes, if that works for you. However, the process may not feel comfortable to everyone. Singing during transitions shouldn't be strenuous or difficult. If you feel uncomfortable having to learn many new songs or

if singing does not come naturally to you, then you need to slow down the process. Like all new (and old) experiences, practice is what guides the process. And practice happens through repetition.

If singing seems daunting at first, chant the verses, whisper them, or hum them. The goal is to be playful and to reduce the stress that often builds during transition times, especially unplanned transitions such as emergency fire drills or periods of unexpected waiting. Make friends with each song. As Ruth Seeger says, "We just need to carry the song around us, as children do." (Seeger 2002). Careful observation is an important part of this process. Noticing what children are doing during the day will allow you to create original and exciting songs that are specific to the children and the activities in your setting.

Teachers play an extremely important role in the lives of young children. Carefully planned transitions can help prevent unnecessary confusion and disruptive behavior. Using participatory songs to help children predict what is coming up next is a powerful (and fun!) tool to help them through the many changes in a day.

References:

Honig, Alice Sterling. (1995). "Singing with Infants and Toddlers." *Young Children* (July 1995) 72-78.

Seeger, Ruth Crawford. (2002). *American Folksongs for Children*. New York: Oak Publications

Nina Araújo, co-author of Easy Songs for Smooth Transitions, has worked in the field of early childhood education—in orphanages, public and private preschools, laboratory schools, and child care centers—for over twenty years. Nina has taught early childhood education courses, trained student teachers in preschool classrooms, and presented at national conferences. She is currently the director of Picasso's Playground, an educational consulting firm that serves communities in North and South America. Her work focuses on helping teachers cultivate safe relationships between children and their caregivers in the classroom or at home, incorporating music, movement, art, and environmental design.

"Daily Transitions and Participatory Songs." From the Redleaf Press Web site at www.redleafpress.org (Redleaf Press, June 2006). ©2006 by Nina Araújo. Reprinted with permission from the author. For more information, see *Easy Songs for Smooth Transitions* (www.redleafpress.org or 1-800-423-8309).

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Internet Information

by Joseph Morra

The web site of the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro contains a useful section entitled "Terrific Transitions," which offers a wide variety of tip sheets, articles, and activity calendars to support the diverse adults involved in a child's transition from preschool to kindergarten. Its goal is to encourage adults to make this important transition as effective and easy as possible for the child.

What makes the site even more interesting is its different pages specific to families/parents, teachers (both preschool and kindergarten), and non-classroom personnel, all of whom may have specific questions and responsibilities for the children in their care.

The Spanish component of the site is small—14 parent tip sheets available in both languages—but nonetheless very useful for both families and teachers.

<http://www.serve.org/TT/>

A Special Journey

(continued from page three)

within a child's natural environment, child care providers have a wealth of information about a child's functioning during her/his day. Being open to having EI staff come to your child care and share information is extremely valuable.

Most importantly, child care providers should always remember that despite a parent/guardian's reaction to and/or participation in services, this transition is a journey. Families cannot be rushed through the stages. Families move at their own pace, and every family's experience is different. A common thread, however, is that they will need caring and understanding people to support and meet them "where they are." Keeping this idea in mind will make the journey easier for everyone.

Working together and armed with an extensive knowledge of the child from parents, child care providers, and EI staff, we can have a tremendous impact on every child's ability to be an active participant in play, activities, and routines—a wish we have for all children.

To get more information and/or brochures about EI, visit the RI Department of Human Services web site at **<http://www.dhs.ri.gov/dhs/famchild/dchspec.htm>**, or call (401) 462-5300.