

The Director's Link

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Implementing Continuity for Infants and Toddlers

Kay Albrecht, Barbara Milnor,
Kaitlyn Hunter, Leslie Jackson



Continuity of care during early childhood is not a new idea. Keeping children together with the same teacher and peer group, also called looping or sustained instruction, has been around the educational world for a long time and is standard early childhood practice in many countries.

Recommendations supporting continuity are institutionalized in NAEYC's accreditation standards, Early Head Start performance standards, some states' licensing standards, and educational publications such as *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* and Zero to Three's *Caring for Infants and Toddlers in Groups*. Ron Lally, an advocate for high-quality care and early education for our youngest citizens, considers continuity one of six keys to providing the type of relationships that help children thrive.

Why, then, do some young children still experience three or more transitions in teachers, classrooms, and peer groups—sometimes several additional times across the child care day—before they turn 3? One answer might be that programs still struggle with understanding and responding to the challenges they face in implementing continuity.

Let's look at some steps that can help provide the leadership to increase continuity for infants and toddlers. To make progress toward providing continuity, teachers and families need to know more about continuity and its positive contributions to children's emotional and developmental growth. Anecdotal evidence indicates that programs and directors want to implement these practices and have tried to do so, only to find resistance and concerns from teachers and families.

The first step in successful implementation is to understand primary caregiving and continuity. Understanding attachment, the importance of building warm relationships, implementing predictable and

responsive routines, using small groups, understanding the impact of culture on very young children, and building partnerships with families will need to be part of teachers' professional development and included in family engagement prior to, during, and after enrollment.

It is important to think of continuity as a multidimensional concept, as it has several components. Continuity of the teacher is the most familiar, but three more components are embedded in this idea: continuity of peer group or friends, continuity of environment, and continuity of individualized schedule and caregiving routines.

Creeping Along...

Intentional staffing is a foundational next step. A typical cause of discontinuity is the long child care day, in which children spend time with break staff and wraparound staff and not with the most frequent caregiver. Intentional staffing uses a team approach to reduce the number of caregiver changes children experience, and it looks at how many and which caregivers each child interacts with across the day in assigning staffing, with the goal of limiting children's time with unfamiliar adults. Examples include assigning the same break teacher to each group and replacing departing teachers with the same person.

Scheduling primary teachers to arrive and depart in alignment with children's group schedules is another consideration. Although this can be challenging with the dynamic schedule variability of families, it can go a long way to ensure continuity.

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Implementing well-planned transitions of longer duration joins intentional staffing. Licensing standards often designate child/staff ratios that determine when children are moved from one age group to another. Then, financial considerations come into play. When it isn't possible to extend the child's tenure with the same teacher, transition plans can provide children with the time and experience they need to make such changes. Plans should include visits to the new classroom with the familiar caregiver and visits by the new teacher to the current classroom while the primary caregiver is present. Incremental increases in exposure to the new classroom help children learn about the similarities and differences in the new room.

Pulling to a Stand...

Exploring each child's fit with the continuity of care plan is a next step. Each child has a temperament and individual personal schedule. As a result, responses to change will vary. This is also true of families. They come in all sizes, configurations, and from a variety of cultures. Taking these variables into consideration in making plans for each child begs for attention. For example, a child who takes a long time to transition in the morning should not be expected to make quick changes in caregivers. A child who is highly distracted by noise and light can be assigned to a classroom with light dimmers and a variety of light sources. A family that needs sensitive responses to family concerns should talk with a teacher who enjoys a high level of connection with families.

Then look at the child's experience across the day. What is his or her typical arrival and departure schedule; how long is the child's day; how many changes in continuity does the child experience; what happens when changes occur? Consider turnover in children and teachers, such as a teacher who is leaving or whether a family is expecting another child. Accommodating circumstances such as these should be part of continuity planning.

Balancing without Support...

Develop plans to pair each child with a primary caregiver—the person who invests in building a relationship with a smaller group of children and their families, with the goal of becoming knowledgeable about each child's temperament, schedule, preferences, and interests. The primary caregiver uses this knowledge to individualize her responses to each child and communicate effectively with the child's family. The assignment can be as simple as dividing the children among the available adults, or as complex as considering the child's participation schedule, personality, or the family's preferences for the personality and disposition of the teacher.

Regardless of the caregiver assignment strategy, teachers will need support for the inevitable challenges of primary caregiving and coaching and mentoring in understanding that primary care is not care that is exclusive to one teacher. Families will likely need support in partnering with teachers and opportunities to learn more about how teachers implement primary caregiving.

Taking a Few Steps...

Lengthening the time children stay with their primary teacher comes next. Once the structural foundation for continuity is in place, and both families and teachers understand the concepts, then you can consider providing the leadership to figure out strategies for extending the time individual children have with their primary teacher and group.

When children are successful in building reciprocal relationships with the primary caregiver, and teachers and families are able to negotiate ways to partner with each other, this next step should come easily, as teachers and families resist the urge to move children to new teachers and new classrooms only because they have aged or acquired a particular developmental skill.

This article is based on a continuum developed in conjunction with Barbara Milner, Kaitlyn Hunter, and Leslie Jackson.

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Our Mission

The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University is dedicated to building the leadership capacity of the early childhood workforce. The activities of the McCormick Center encompass four areas: professional development, evaluation, research, and public awareness.

<http://cecl.nl.edu>



The Director's Toolbox

Staffing Pattern Worksheet

Staffing patterns in infant and toddler classrooms are complicated and require consideration of many variables (length of the teacher's day, children's arrival and departure times, availability of extra staff to offer breaks, etc.). Use the staffing pattern worksheet to help you figure out how many changes the children enrolled in your program experience. Then, apply the strategies suggested in the article to see what you can do to lower the number and/or stabilize the consistency of caregivers across the day.

Time	Room A	Room B	Room C	Room D	Room E
6:30 am					
7:00 am					
7:30 am					
8:00 am					
8:30 am					
9:00 am					
9:30 am					
10:00 am					
10:30 am					
11:00 am					
11:30 am					
12 noon					
12:30 pm					
1:00 pm					
1:30 pm					
2:00 pm					
2:30 pm					
3:00 pm					
3:30 pm					
4:00 pm					
4:30 pm					
5:00 pm					
5:30 pm					
6:00 pm					
6:30 pm					
Number of Caregivers across the Day					

Strategies to increase continuity:

- ◆ Use intentional staffing/teaching teams to limit changes in caregivers as much as possible.
- ◆ Implement well planned transitions.
- ◆ Explore each child's fit with continuity plan/look at child's experience across the day in determining placement.
- ◆ Assign a primary caregiver to each child.
- ◆ Lengthen the time children stay with their primary teacher.

Adapted from Hentschel, A. (2009, Summer). Taking a closer look at a child's schedule. *The Director's Link*, p. 3.

Resources

Check out these resources to help you implement continuity for infants and toddlers.

Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (Eds.). (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Davis, K., & Collins, M. (March/April, 2012). *A case for continuity of care: The teachers' perspective*. Exchange, 59-61.

Hunter, K. (March/April, 2012). Responding to the challenge of providing continuity of care and multi-age classrooms. Exchange, 57-58.

Lally, J. R., Griffin, A., Fenichel, E., Segal, M., Szanton, E., & Weissbound, B. (2003). *Caring for infants and toddlers in groups: Developmentally appropriate practice*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three.

Lally, J. R. (2009). *The science and psychology of infant-toddler care How an understanding of early learning has transformed child care*. Zero to Three, 30(2), 47-53.

PITC (Program for Infant/Toddler Care) (2011). PITC's six program policies. Retrieved from http://www.pitc.org/pub/pitc_docs/policies.html.

Come to Leadership Connections national conference and meet J. Ronald Lally



Thursday May 16, 2013
7:00 pm

The Leadership Colloquium, initiated in honor of Dr. Bloom's leadership, provides an opportunity for conference participants to hear from the Visionary Leadership Award recipient. This year, the Colloquium features J. Ronald Lally, co-director, of the Center for Child and Family Studies, WestEd, Sausalito, CA, and executive producer of *Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers*, a video-based training program. Join us for an interactive and engaging conversation with this renowned leader in the field of early care and education.

For more information, go to <http://cecl.nl.edu/lc> or contact Donna Jonas at donna.jonas@nl.edu.

Social Media Mania

Thursday, November 29 and Friday, November 30, 2012

9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Google+...Does trying to keep up make your head spin? Don't panic! Join the McCormick Center's resident social media experts as they show you the ropes during this two-day hands-on technology institute. Meets IDC requirements.

Cost: \$45 per day

Location: National Louis University 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL

For more information, go to <http://cecl.nl.edu/training/workshops.htm>



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Kay M. Albrecht is the author of the *Innovations* series of infant, toddler, and preschool curricula and training materials. She is a former teacher and directed the first infant-toddler program to successfully achieve NAEYC accreditation. Dr. Albrecht is

also the academic editor of Exchange magazine, and the creator of *Out of the Box Training Kits*.

Kaitlyn Hunter is the executive director of Family and Child Services at Integris Health, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Leslie Jackson is adjunct faculty at Rio Salado College and former director of St. Augustine's, Phoenix, Arizona.

Barbara Milner is an early childhood consultant and adjunct faculty at Central Arizona College, Phoenix, Arizona.

Professional Development

Hurry! Only a Few Spaces Available



Hurry! Only a Few Spaces Available. Fall Management Institute

What's the Difference? Managing Infant-Toddler Programs

Kay M. Albrecht

October 19–20, 2012

Do you know how to adjust your leadership style to fit the unique needs of your infant-toddler program? Program planning, implementation, and evaluation in early infant-toddler programs is different from administering preschool programs. Learn strategies to help you adapt and be successful.

The training is held at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National Louis University, Wheeling Campus Annex.

Registration fee is \$200 and includes handouts, breakfast, and lunch.

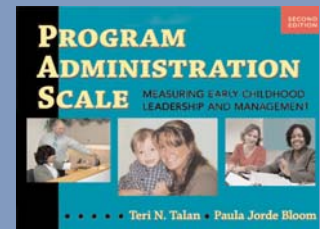
College credit (ECE 582 The Administration of Infant-Toddler Programs) is available for an additional fee.

Contact your local child care resource and referral agency for professional development funds to cover institute fees and college credit.

Learn more details about this great institute at <http://cecl.nl.edu/training/institutesfmi.html>

Program Administration Scale Reliability Training

October 23–26, 2012



The *Program Administration Scale* (PAS) measures leadership and management practices of center-based early care and education programs. Assessor Training includes an overview of the instrument, how to rate indicators and score items, the protocol for interviewing and collecting data, and procedures for verifying documentation. Individuals who successfully complete the training are eligible to become certified PAS assessors. This four-day training is designed for technical assistance specialists, quality monitors, management consultants, researchers, and other professionals interested in using the PAS to reliably assess early childhood leadership and management practices.

The training is held at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National Louis University, Wheeling Campus Annex.

Registration fee is \$1,025 and includes all texts, materials, and meals.

College credit (ECE 582 C Administration and Program Administration Evaluation) is available for an additional fee.

Learn more details about this training at <http://cecl.nl.edu/training/pas.htm>

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Join McCormick Center staff at these events and explore the tools needed to reach the full potential of your program.

NAEYC Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA

Wednesday, November 7, 2012

Preconference session 8:30 - 11:30 am

Room B213 Georgia World Congress Center

A Great Place to Work: Creating a healthy organizational climate,

Jill Bella

1:00 – 8:00 pm

Omni Hotel, Atlanta Room; International Ballroom F

Join **Giovanni Arroyo**, Fran Simon, Chip Donohue and other experts at *Tech on Deck*. Network and learn more about how to integrate technology in your classrooms using techniques consistent with the NAEYC and Fred Rogers Center joint position statement.



Collaborative for Children, Houston, Texas

November 27-30, 2012

Program Administration Scale (PAS) Reliability Training

Jill Bella and Teri Talan

attention early childhood administrators

Are you looking for a convenient, flexible, and inexpensive way to attain a director credential? Or perhaps you're seeking management coursework but want to learn on your own time in the comfort of your home.



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online national director credential

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May 16 – 18, 2013

For more information, contact
Donna Jonas, Conference Coordinator
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Check out photos from Leadership Connections 2012 at

<http://cecl.nl.edu/trainings/lc.htm>