

Continuity and discontinuity between ECEC and school

August 2026

This research summary shares insights on continuities and discontinuities in the transition between early childhood education and care (ECEC) and school, drawing from a rapid review of recent literature. It challenges binary interpretations of continuity as positive or negative, provides greater clarity on the topic and highlights aspects that research suggests matter most for supporting successful transitions between settings.

Continuity and transition

Transitions from ECEC to school represent a critical period in children's education. Within both research and policy contexts, there's broad consensus that successful transitions between settings contribute positively to children's learning, development and wellbeing outcomes (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022; Berezovska et al., 2025; Boylan et al., 2024).

Transitions are a process that takes time, starting before school (often in ECEC) and extending well beyond the first day of school.

When children move from ECEC to school, some changes in their educational environments are inevitable (Puroila et al., 2021). Continuity is commonly associated with a successful transition, yet not all continuities are positive (Engel et al., 2024). Moving beyond a binary view of continuity as positive and discontinuity as inherently negative is required for a fuller understanding of the concept. Both continuities and discontinuities are considered integral to children's successful transition from ECEC to school and may be important, beneficial and developmentally appropriate for children's learning and development (Dockett & Perry, 2021; Hayes, 2024; Teksum et al., 2025; Vitiello et al., 2022b; Zhong, 2023).

On one hand, continuities provide stability and familiarity. On the other hand, discontinuities introduce new challenges that are necessary for growth and development (Hogsnes et al., 2025, as cited in Teksum et al., 2025, p. 5). This is provided that these challenges are met with appropriate support (Ma et al., 2022; Odgaard, 2023).

Summary of the evidence

This research summary draws on a search of 5 key academic databases: EBSCO, Gale OneFile, Informit, ProQuest and Google Scholar. It followed a rapid review methodology (Garritty et al., 2024). A team of researchers searched for articles published between August 2020 and August 2025 using criteria related to transition, continuity of learning and discontinuity of learning. Following a screening process undertaken through Covidence, 67 articles were identified for full-text review due to relevance.

Defining continuity and discontinuity

There is no consensus in the literature, but 2 dominant conceptualisations of continuity and discontinuity emerge. Continuity is referred to as ‘similarities, familiarity, consistency, and coordination’. Discontinuity is defined as ‘differences, discrepancies, incoherence, and unfamiliarity’ (Due et al., 2023; Franko & Zhang, 2021; Hayes, 2024; Justice et al., 2022; King, 2024; Vitiello et al., 2022b, 2022a).

Acknowledging the diversity of conceptualisations within the literature, this research summary adopts the following definitions:

Continuity is an alignment, similarity or progression – an emphasis on consistency with a focus on shared pedagogical practices, learning environments and expectations.

Discontinuity is a change, incoherence or difference – a focus on breaks or disconnections, changes in pedagogical practices, learning experiences and learning environments.

Challenge and change

The literature consistently emphasises that discontinuities aren’t inherently negative. Discontinuities can serve as a contributor to productive challenge and cognitive growth, and can foster independence and adaptability (Hayes, 2024; Ma et al., 2022; Teksum et al., 2025). Teaching and learning the same or similar things can lead to redundancy from ECEC to school. Teaching and learning needs to support progression, respond to changes in educational demands and be developmentally appropriate¹ and effective (Christopher & Nesbitt, 2023; Cohen-Vogel et al., 2020, 2021; Ma et al., 2022).

Although all children experience some discontinuities when moving from ECEC to school, for some children differences between settings can have a greater influence on adjustment, participation and learning (Dockett & Perry, 2021; Hayes, 2024) and support may be required (Ma et al., 2022; Odgaard, 2023).

¹ AERO’s [Early Childhood Learning Trajectories](#) are a practical resource providing guidance to support children’s learning across 5 key interconnected domains of learning and development: executive functions, social and emotional learning, mathematical thinking, language and communication, and physical development.

Three interrelated domains

Paying attention to when children are experiencing challenges with discontinuity is important as disruptions to young people's educational engagement can significantly influence their sense of continuity in education (Ziebell et al., 2025).

Three interrelated domains of impact emerged through the literature: **social and relational, learning and development** and **language and cultural** and are explored in the following sections.

Social and relational

Relationships are central. Children who experience strong relational continuity (between educators and/or teachers, families and peers) tend to transition more smoothly and experience a sense of connection and belonging to learning and place (Hayes, 2024; King, 2024; Sheridan et al., 2022; Vitiello et al., 2022a; Ziebell et al., 2025). Children with additional needs can experience social and relational discontinuities as the school year progresses (Ishikawa et al., 2024). Relationships and interactions can also change during transition, some are lost, some are maintained, while others need to be built or rebuilt (Degli Esposti & Cigala, 2025; Dockett & Perry, 2021; Ehrlich et al., 2021).

Families can also experience impacts of relational discontinuity (Lazzari et al., 2020; Merideth et al., 2022). Collaborative partnerships with families characterised by information sharing, effective engagement and support for both children and family through transitions have been associated with effective transition practices. They also support families in understanding where things are the same and different between settings (Boylan et al., 2024).

Implications for practice

To support children's transitions from ECEC to school, educators, teachers and leaders should:

- **Focus on relationships** – Intentionally building and sustaining relationships for children between peers and with adults, prioritising high-quality relationships and interactions is critical.
- **Involve families in the process** – Working with families to understand what they may find different (or where they may need support) can help, particularly where this is their first child to make the transition.

Learning and development

Discontinuities in teaching methods, expectations or environments create a sense of separation from previous experiences (Hogsnes & Moser, 2014, as cited in Teksum et al., 2025). For some children, sudden shifts in teachers, teaching and/or instructional approaches, new tasks and the loss of familiar play activities (Degli Esposti & Cigala, 2025), alongside changes in routines, rules and expectations across settings, may lead to children experiencing a less successful transition (e.g., Lazzari et al., 2020; Preece, 2021; Sands & Meadan, 2024; Viskovic & Višnjić-Jevtić, 2020).

In contrast, Australian research incorporating children's perspectives suggests that discontinuities across settings can also be productive. Children often described differences between preschool and school as providing opportunities to learn new things, participate in unfamiliar literacy and learning practices, and expand their knowledge and skills, indicating that change also supports learning and development (Cronin et al., 2022; Wilders & Wood, 2023).

Continuity doesn't mean 'schoolification'² of the ECEC system or 'preschoolification' of the school system (Garner et al., 2021; Višnjić-Jevtić & Visković, 2021). Promoting continuity isn't about making the settings identical, so that transitions become seamless. Instead, continuity is about supporting children in building on their prior learning and experiences across settings (Dockett & Perry, 2021) and providing support and scaffolding to navigate these differences as or when needed (Apostolou, 2022; Cronin et al., 2022; Wilder & Lillvist, 2022; Wilders & Wood, 2023).

When information flows through ECEC and school settings (González-Moreira et al., 2025) and there is collaboration between staff across settings – including joint professional development – continuity is enhanced (e.g., Ehrlich et al., 2021; Einarsdottir & Sigurdardottir, 2022; Hayes, 2024; King, 2024).

Implications for practice

To support children's transitions from ECEC to school, educators, teachers and leaders should:

- **Prioritise collaboration** – Understanding and building on what's gone before and discussing coherent and aligned progression of learning, wellbeing and development drawing on evidence (rather than relying on prevailing assumptions).

Language and cultural

While there is less research in this area, themes across the evidence in this domain include transition to dominant instruction in English for children with English as an additional language or dialect and transition to school for First Nations children. Children experience an implicit shift in rules and expectations when moving to school, which can impact their self-confidence and identity. This impact is especially significant for children from migrant backgrounds (Lazzari et al., 2020). Cultural discontinuities – where children's cultural identities, values and beliefs aren't valued or recognised by dominant Western pedagogies – has been highlighted in Australian literature (Bobongie & Jackson, 2019, 2022). Understanding children's perspectives, creating spaces that support genuine conversations, sharing cultural artefacts and yarning circles were protective elements that support transition in culturally responsive ways (Bobongie & Jackson, 2022).

Implications for practice

To support children's transitions from ECEC to school, educators, teachers and leaders should:

- **Consider if practices are culturally responsive** – This means valuing children's cultural identities, partnering authentically with families and communities, listening to children's perspectives, and creating environments where every child experiences belonging, recognition and success.

Personalised and relational process

The transition to school is best understood as a personalised and relational process. For every child, the continuities and discontinuities across settings are multiple, diverse and interconnected, reflecting the interplay between individual characteristics, family contexts and the practices of both ECEC and school environments.

2 The practice of employing formal school-like practices in ECEC settings.

For some children additional support may be needed to bridge the gap between prior experiences and the new setting. This includes providing additional scaffolds where the discontinuity is stark or jarring. The literature suggests that this may be particularly relevant for children:

- from low socio-economic backgrounds (Ehrlich et al., 2021)
- with additional needs and disabilities (Ishikawa et al., 2024; Sands & Meadan, 2024; Wilder & Lillvist, 2022)
- who are First Nations (Bobongie & Jackson, 2019, 2022)
- from migrant or linguistically diverse backgrounds (Ma et al., 2022; Zhong, 2023).

Implications for practice

To support children's transitions from ECEC to school, educators, teachers and leaders should:

- **Identify children who may need additional support early** – Use available information to identify children who are likely to need more support and collaborate to monitor their experience, to facilitate timely response.
- **Plan responsive supports (where required)** – Tailor transition supports to meet the needs of an individual child by considering prior experiences, the presence of supportive relationships and the potential for negative impacts.

Conclusion

While both continuity and discontinuity appear to be important, there is no perfect recipe for gaining the right balance of continuity and discontinuity for each child. (Hayes, 2024). Approaches that are tailored and supported by effective communication and collaboration between stakeholders help to support children prior to, during and after the transition to school and facilitate positive transition outcomes (Einarsdottir & Sigurdardottir, 2022). Gradual, well-supported transition processes, including transition activities that help children become familiar with the new environment and expectations, contribute to more positive transition experiences (Degli Esposti & Cigala, 2025).

More information

This research summary is part of a series of publications AERO has produced on transitions, including:



a discussion paper on [measuring effective transitions to school](#)



[videos](#)



[research summaries](#)



[practice guides.](#)

These resources are all available from [AERO's website](#).

References

- Apostolou, Z. T. (2022). Continuities, discontinuities and transition in early childhood literacy education at digital time. *Preschool Education: Global Trends*, 2, 64–93. <https://doi.org/10.31470/2786-703X-2022-2-64-93>
- Australian Government Department of Education. (2022). *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia (V2.0)*. Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/EYLF-2022-V2.0.pdf>
- Berezovska, L., Saraieva, I., Britskan, T., Ushnevych, S., & Tytun, O. (2025). The use of educational technologies for ensuring continuity of preschool and primary education. *Eduweb*, 19(2), 167–183. <https://doi.org/10.46502/issn.1856-7576/2025.19.02.12>
- Bobongie, F., & Jackson, C. (2019). Stronger smarter: Transformational change for Australian schools with rock-solid foundations in the early years. In J. Allan, V. Harwood, & C. Rubner Jorgensen (Eds.), *World yearbook of education 2020: Schooling, governance and inequalities* (pp. 161–176). Routledge.
- Bobongie, F., & Jackson, C. (2022). Understanding cultural artefacts to ensure seamless transitions in the early years. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 47(1), 62–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391211055864>
- Boylan, F., Barblett, L., Lavina, L., & Ruscoe, A. (2024). Transforming transitions to primary school: Using children's funds of knowledge and identity. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 32(4), 704–718. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2023.2291354>
- Christopher, C., & Nesbitt, K. (2023). Consistency and inconsistency in learning experiences across the early grades. *Frontiers in Education*, 8, Article 1265501. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2023.1265501>
- Cohen-Vogel, L., Little, M., Jang, W., Burchinal, M., & Bratsch-Hines, M. (2021). A missed opportunity? Instructional content redundancy in pre-K and kindergarten. *AERA Open*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211006163>
- Cohen-Vogel, L., Sadler, J. R., Little, M., & Merrill, B. (2020). (Mis)alignment of instructional policy supports in Pre-K and kindergarten: Evidence from rural districts in North Carolina. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 52 Part B(3), 30–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.11.001>
- Cronin, L. P., Kervin, L., & Mantei, J. (2022). Transition to school: Children's perspectives of the literacy experiences on offer as they move from pre-school to the first year of formal schooling. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 45(1), 103–121. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44020-022-00008-0>
- Degli Esposti, C., & Cigala, A. (2025). Children's experience of transition from preschool to primary school: A scoping literature review. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-025-02019-1>
- Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2021). Defining transition. In S. Dockett & B. Perry (Eds.), *Evaluating transition to school programs: Learning from research and practice* (pp. 15–26). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003055112-2/defining-transition-sue-dockett-bob-perry>

Due, K., Skoog, M., Areljung, S., Ottander, C., & Sundberg, B. (2023). Teachers' conceptualisations of science teaching – Obstacles and opportunities for pedagogical continuity across early childhood school forms. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 31(3), 790–805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2022.2107492>

Ehrlich, S. B., DeMeo Cook, K. D., Thomson, D., Kauertz, K., Barrows, M. R., Halle, T., Gordon, M. F., Soli, M., Schaper, A., Her, S., & Guerra, G. (2021). *Understanding cross-systems transitions from head start to kindergarten: A review of the knowledge base and a theory of change* (OPRE report # 2021–128). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://acf.gov/opre/report/understanding-cross-systems-transitions-head-start-kindergarten-review-knowledge-base>

Einarsdottir, J., & Sigurdardottir, I. (2022, April 21). *Educational continuity: Collaboration among educators in preschools, primary schools, and after-school centers* [Paper presentation]. Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association: Cultivating equitable education systems for the 21st century, San Diego, California. <https://doi.org/10.3102/1880693>

Engel, M., Jacob, R., Hart Erickson, A., Mattera, S., Shaw Attaway, D., & Claessens, A. (2024). The alignment of P–3 math instruction. *AERA Open*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584241281483>

Franko, M. D., & Zhang, D. (2021). Aligning preschool and kindergarten classroom learning experiences: Effects on children's school readiness. In S. T. Vorkapić & J. LoCasale-Crouch (Eds.), *Supporting children's well-being during early childhood transition to school* (pp. 60–83). Information Science Reference. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-4435-8.ch004>

Garner, R., Nicholas, M., & Rouse, E. (2021). Cross-sector early years teacher collaboration: Using professional learning workshops as boundary objects for professional boundary crossing. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 29(5), 764–779. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2021.1968462>

Garritty, C., Hamel, C., Trivella, M., Gartlehner, G., Nussbaumer-Streit, B., Devane, D., Kamel, C., Griebler, U., & King, V. J. (2024). Updated recommendations for the Cochrane rapid review methods guidance for rapid reviews of effectiveness. *BMJ*, 384, Article e076335. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-076335>

González-Moreira, A., Ferreira, C., & Vidal, J. (2025). A journey to primary education: A systematic review of factors affecting the transition from early childhood education to primary education. *Preventing School Failure*, 69(1), 77–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2024.2335679>

Hayes, J. M. (2024). *"All the stuff" is different: A mixed method study of continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school in New Zealand* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Waikato]. Research Commons. <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/16457>

Ishikawa, N., Ishizuka, Y., Kano, Y., Iida, J., & Yamamoto, J. (2024). Exploring factors of successful transition to elementary school among children with autism spectrum disorder in Japan: A focus group study. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 70(2), 296–305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2022.2088222>

Justice, L. M., Jiang, H., Purtell, K. M., Lin, T.-J., & Ansari, A. (2022). Academics of the early primary grades: Investigating the alignment of instructional practices from pre–K to third grade. *Early Education and Development*, 33(7), 1237–1255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2021.1946762>

- King, P. (2024). *An investigation into play-based learning to support children transitioning to primary school* [Master's thesis, University of Auckland]. ResearchSpace@Auckland. <https://hdl.handle.net/2292/70076>
- Lazzari, A., Balduzzi, L., Van Laere, K., Boudry, C., Rezek, M., & Prodger, A. (2020). Sustaining warm and inclusive transitions across the early years: Insights from the START project. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(1), 43–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2020.1707361>
- Ma, J., Hammer, M., & Veresov, N. (2022). Cultural-historical study of crises in child role adjustment during transition to school within a bi-cultural context. *Early Child Development and Care*, 192(8), 1243–1256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1865336>
- Merideth, C., Cavanaugh, B., Romas, S., Ralston, N., Arias, E., Tarasawa, B., & Waggoner, J. (2022). Family perceptions of participating in a structured summer kindergarten transition program. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 50(8), 1383–1394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01268-0>
- Odgaard, A. B. (2023). Questioning continuity: On children's transition from day-care to kindergarten class in Denmark. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 14(1), 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jped-2023-0006>
- Preece, V. K. (2021). *Young children's bodies: Multiple perspectives on the embodied experience of starting school* [Doctoral dissertation, Open University]. Open Research Online. <https://doi.org/10.21954/ou.ro.00081236>
- Puroila, A.-M., Juutinen, J., Viljamaa, E., Sirkko, R., Kyrönlampi, T., & Takala, M. (2021). Young children's belonging in finnish educational settings: An intersectional analysis. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 53(1), 9–29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-021-00282-y>
- Sands, M. M., & Meadan, H. (2024). Transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities: Parent and kindergarten teacher perceptions and experiences. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 43(4), 265–277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02711214221146748>
- Sheridan, S. M., Knoche, L. L., Boise, C., Witte, A., Koziol, N., Prokasky, A., Schumacher, R., & Kerby, H. (2022). Relationships as malleable factors for children's social-behavioral skills from preschool to grade 1: A longitudinal analysis. *Early Education and Development*, 33(6), 958–978. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2021.1936374>
- Teksum, T. N., Moen, K. M., & Gerdin, G. (2025). From kindergarten to primary school – Physical education as a support for students' transition. *European Physical Education Review*, 32(2), 333–350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336x251353739>
- Viskovic, I., & Višnjić-Jevtić, A. (2020). Transition as a shared responsibility. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 28(3), 262–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2020.1803048>
- Višnjić-Jevtić, A., & Visković, I. (2021). Children's perspective on transition from kindergarten to primary school: Croatian experience. In S. T. Vorkapić & J. LoCasale-Crouch (Eds.), *Supporting children's well-being during early childhood transition to school* (pp. 42–59). Information Science Reference. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-4435-8.ch003>

Vitiello, V. E., Nguyen, T., Ruzek, E., Pianta, R. C., & Whittaker, J. V. (2022a). Differences between pre-K and kindergarten classroom experiences: Do they predict children's social-emotional skills and self-regulation across the transition to kindergarten? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 59(2), 287–299. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.11.009>

Vitiello, V. E., Nguyen, T., Ruzek, E., Pianta, R. C., & Whittaker, J. V. (2022b). Differences between pre-K and kindergarten contexts and achievement across the kindergarten transition. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 80(May–June), Article 101396. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2022.101396>

Wilder, J., & Lillvist, A. (2022). Teachers' and parents' meaning making of children's learning in transition from preschool to school for children with intellectual disability. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 37(2), 340–355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1889847>

Wilders, C., & Wood, E. (2023). "If I play I won't learn": Children's perceptions and experiences of transition and school readiness from Maternelle to Year 1. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 21(2), 162–180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X221145460>

Zhong, G. (2023). *Family involvement in school transition: Chinese migrant families' experiences of children transitioning from early childhood education to primary school in New Zealand* [Doctoral dissertation, Auckland University of Technology]. AUT Research Repository. <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/16579>

Ziebell, N., Page, J., McLean Davies, L., Gannaway, J., Herrington, M. H., & Mentha, S. (2025). Teacher education as a site for critical conversations on continuity of learning practices. In H. Stokes & L. McLean Davies (Eds.), *Critical conversations in teacher education: Contemporary Australian perspectives* (pp. 191–207). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83608-908-720251028>

Acknowledgement

AERO would like to acknowledge the First Nations' ERG members and the external reviewer who provided expert reviews of this content.