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Constructing the space of transition within the early childhood education and care pedagogical environment: A child's resources and positions

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journals.sagepub.com/home/cie**Raija Raittila** 

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Abstract

This article examines how the space of transition is constructed within and linked to the early childhood education and care (ECEC) pedagogical environment during a child's first transition to ECEC. In many studies, this transition has been characterised as a stressful situation in which to cope successfully with the demands of the new environment. In this study, the focus is on the construction of the space of transition and, particularly, on children's active involvement in this process. The data include video recordings from children's first days in ECEC. We focus on children's resources and discuss how the pedagogical environment enabled newcomers' active positions, which they used to reshape daily practices in ECEC. The emerging space of transition was constructed on the basis of the relations that the newcomers enabled in the situation. The results shed new light on the strengths of the newcomers as co-constructors of daily practices of the ECEC pedagogical environment, even on the first day of the transition. In addition, the space of transition as a new conceptual way to explore educational transitions is discussed.

Keywords

early childhood education and care, transition, space, relational ontology, longitudinal follow-up

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Introduction

This article examines how the space of transition is constructing and constructed within the early childhood education pedagogical environment when a child moves for the first time from home care to early childhood education and care (ECEC). The transition from home to ECEC can be considered a significant change in a young child's life. During this process, the child faces a new social setting and social relationships (Lucas Revilla et al., 2022).

Educational transitions are often conceptualised as processes that involve a person's move from one institutional setting or phase to another within the educational continuum formed by diverse educational institutions (Fabian and Dunlop, 2002; Lam and Pollard, 2006; Perry et al., 2014; Vogler et al., 2008). Transition can be seen as causing changes at three levels: the individual, the relationship and the context (Niesel and Griebel, 2007). These levels are intertwined in real life but could be viewed as theoretically separate. From the individual's point of view, changes in a child's activities, identity and roles are inevitable in the new physical and social environment because opportunities, expectations and goals in the new institution differ from those of the child's earlier situation (Dockett and Einarsdóttir, 2017; Lam, 2009; Lam and Pollard, 2006).

For the individual, the process of transition can be characterised as including an experience of ambiguity and 'in-betweenness' within a changing context (Lam and Pollard, 2006; White et al., 2021). In transition, the child establishes new relationships with both new adults and new children, as well as the context. Sometimes, children even lose previous relationships (Niesel and Griebel, 2007; Recchia and Dvorakova, 2012). The contextual-level changes concern developmental and behavioural demands that are socially regulated by the receiving institution during the transition (Fabian and Dunlop, 2002). This is closely related to the individual changes. The newcomers face a new context in which they build their own position in relation to other actors and the order of the institution (Dockett and Einarsdóttir, 2017; Lam, 2009).

In studies on infants' and toddlers' transitions from home to ECEC, much of the focus has been on how children adapt to a new environment (Brooker, 2008; Dalli, 1999). The studies have described how transition is a demanding and even stressful period for toddlers (Datler et al., 2010; Nystad et al., 2021). Thus, previous literature on young children's transitions has provided rich insights into transition as a socio-emotional process and the role of educators in this process (Gath et al., 2023; Lipponen and Pursi, 2022). However, what has gained less attention in the studies with infants and toddlers are children's own contributions to the process and the related changes in the ECEC environment in this process. Previous literature on children's socio-spatial contributions, focusing on children's lived spaces and lived experiences, has addressed the everyday socio-spatialities in practice in ECEC settings in general without reference to transitions (see, e.g. Pairman, 2018; see also Vuorisalo et al., 2015). The few studies that have specifically explored transitions from home to ECEC with socio-spatial lenses have underlined the role of material objects in this process (Lucas Revilla et al., 2023), as well as children's development of mobility to support their explorations of the new environment (Costa, 2021). To address this gap in the infant-toddler transition literature, we will look at transition as a socially and spatially constructed dynamic process and study how the construction of the space of transition occurs within the ECEC pedagogical environment.

We understand the ECEC pedagogical environment as a frame within which the space of transition is constructed when a new child joins the group. Our research gaze, a special lens, is focused on what happens in the pedagogical environment during the transition. Analysing the everyday environment of ECEC elicits not only knowledge about the special features of the contextual and institutional perspectives of transition (Cook and Hemming, 2011) but also knowledge about how all participants simultaneously co-construct educational environments in daily life.

Moreover, it elicits knowledge about the kinds of positions the actors can take in the construction process of space (Olwig and Gulløv, 2003). Our particular analytical focus is on resources opened for and used by newcomers, as well as on the positions children take and gain on their first day in ECEC. With these, we illustrate the construction of the space of transition.

We use relational spatial ontology to approach the ECEC pedagogical environment and the space of transition (Massey, 2005; see also Jones, 2009; Malpas, 2012). Both are considered to be constructed through relations – that is, reciprocal actions and communication between actors in the physical, social and societal contexts of everyday practices (Raittila and Vuorisalo, 2021). In relational theories about the human–environment connection, the environment is understood as a process (Fuller and Löw, 2017; Raittila, 2012; Soja, 1996). The space of transition is intertwined with a comprehensive ECEC pedagogical environment. The early education setting forms a new social, cultural and physical environment around the child who is a newcomer in the group, but according to relational thinking, the environment is also reorganised by each newcomer. The proposition that the space of transition emerges in common relational processes between children and adults in ECEC is well-founded.

Relational approach to spatiality in ECEC and the space of transition

The relational approach to spatiality means that the environment is understood as a process. Ontologically, this is based on the view that space is constructing and constructed when actors and physical, cultural as well as social spatial elements encounter each other (Fritz and Binder, 2018; Fuller and Löw, 2017; Raittila and Siippainen 2022; Soja, 1996). According to this approach, the environment cannot be defined without the people living in it. The environment is reshaped with the interpretations, social activities and negotiation of various actors and parties. Space and society are mutually constitutive (Massey, 2005). The ECEC pedagogical environment changes with situational factors, and it is constantly being constructed in everyday life as a result of human activities (Raittila, 2012).

Following this line of thinking, our starting point is that the space of transition could be understood as constructed in the process of child entering to a new ECEC group, when new relations start to emerge and already-existing relations change. The transition to the ECEC pedagogical environment changes a child's relations as they are constructed in the new circumstances. The relational approach poses questions such as how the environment is constructed and constructing rather than what the environment is (Fuller and Löw, 2017). For an individual, the space of transition takes shape as a process in many places and different times, for example, already beginning at home before the child comes for the first time to ECEC. However, in this article, we limit the analysis of the space of transition to the child's first day in the ECEC pedagogical environment and to action in ECEC group.

To co-construct the space, individuals utilise resources. Resources are either the person's own or those provided or put into use in situations (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Lehtinen, 2000). Resources may be skills, tendencies, characteristics or goods (Grenfell and James, 1998), such as knowledge, playing skills, popularity in the group and toys. A wide range of issues can serve as resources that offer opportunities to participate in shaping and modifying actions. Resources are defined in relations. They gain their value and relevance in real-life activities and relations that construct the space. Thus, the manifestation and use of resources tell something not only about the individual but also about the situation (Vuorisalo and Alanen, 2015), in our case, the child's first day of transition. Transition resources are considered to be those that support the child's activities in the everyday practices of ECEC during the transition (Can et al., 2023). Based on resources, participants also create and achieve positions in social action.

The concept of position can be described as status/role taken by or given to somebody in action. However, the concepts of role and role behaviour focus on static and formal aspects. In contrast, the concepts of position and positioning are associated with flexibility and dynamism (Harré and Langenhove, 1999). Positioning is a social activity in which actors try to make action understandable, express their ideas and influence one another (Kukkonen, 2007). It is possible to examine the positioning carried out by an individual and that which is directed at the individual from the outside (Bamberg, 2004). Positions are always created as outcomes of a social process. Managing valued resources determines the positions one can attain (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

We explore transitions as relational processes linked to particular social–spatial contexts. The results we report are situated knowledge about transitions in Finnish ECEC. The space of transition is understood to be constructed within the ECEC pedagogical environment when a new child moves into a child group.

To explore transitions as relational processes, we will focus on children’s resources and emerging positions. By analysing the resources children use in their everyday activities and the positions they attain, our aim is to illustrate how newcomers actively participate in the construction of the space of transition. Our research question is, How do children’s resources contribute to the constitution of diverse positions in the space of transition? Our results allow us to describe how the space of transition is co-constructed within the pedagogical environment of ECEC.

Method and data analysis

This study is based on a qualitative longitudinal follow-up of multiple cases (transitions) in Finnish ECEC in the Trace project. The methodological approach to studying transitions originates from an international collaboration in the ISSEET project. In the Trace project five children were selected for a longitudinal follow-up during their years in ECEC. This article focuses on their first days in ECEC groups with their peers and educators.

In the analysis, the focus was, most importantly, on understanding how newcomers themselves co-construct the space of transition. To do so from a relational perspective, we also analysed what happened in newcomers’ relations with educators and peers, as well as the physical, social and cultural contexts in the same situation: scrutinising the cases to understand how the space of transition was constructed.

The main data source for this article was video recordings from the first days in ECEC, in total nearly 10 h of video data. The video recordings covered various events of the day, including the arrival and departure with the parent’s presence in the setting, adult-guided activities, peer play and routine events such as lunch or snack. The video camera was directed at the case child’s actions and interactions with people and materials close to the child. The researcher recorded the events from a close distance with a small handheld video camera.

Research ethics was carefully considered throughout the research process. Ethical review was carried out by the Human Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of Jyväskylä. Informed consent was acquired from the children’s guardians and educators. Also, careful attention was paid to the children’s nonverbal assent to being studied in the daily situations. Challenges in interpreting the young children’s assent and the negotiations that took place are reflected in more detail elsewhere (Rutanan et al., 2023). The names used in reporting are pseudonyms, and unnecessary details are avoided to make identification of the cases more difficult.

The analysis can be described as abductive, inspired by Jackson and Mazzei’s (2013) work on ‘thinking with theory’, which attempts to maintain sight of the complexity of social life instead of reducing data to themes. The data analysis proceeded in the form of a close dialogue with the theoretical understanding of how space is constructed relationally and with a focus on human–

environment relations (Fuller and Löw, 2017), accepting the partiality of the data (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013). The process started with watching the video data to develop our analytical gaze. Throughout the process, our theoretical understanding of the relational space led us to zoom in on the actions occurring in the situations when there was a newcomer in the group for the first time. Following our relational understanding, this focus on actions was not limited to observation of the newcomer but extended to actions and interactions that enabled us to interpret the relations and structures being constituted in the processes. The focus on processes, along with further theoretical exploration of spatial approaches, led us to focus on the children's symbolic and material resources in these first days in ECEC.

Following this, we focused on interpreting the possible resources that enabled and played a part in constituting the space of transition. Specific questions were posed on how resources enabled positions and how positions gave value to certain resources in the process of transition. Attention was paid to skills, tendencies, characteristics or goods (Grenfell and James, 1998) that seemed to act as resources (such as active engagement, age and eating skills) that offered opportunities to participate and modify the action and thus co-construct the space of transition. As a result of the exploration and interpretation of how these resources were used and how they enabled the constitution of diversities in spaces of transition, children's diverse positions were interpreted and conceptualised as initiator, trainee and participant. These were the positions derived in the analysis that characterised diversities in the processes of constructing spaces of transition within ECEC pedagogical environments.

To illustrate these processes, we selected some episodes from the analysed data that were particularly rich in negotiations of social-spatial relations. They describe how newcomers utilise their resources and positions in the pedagogical environment of ECEC.

Construction of the space of transition: Lenses on resources and positions

The following vignette is from the first day when Henry (one-year-old) stays without his parents in the ECEC centre. Henry's mother stays a while to watch how the first day begins. Tarja, an educator, is taking care of Henry and five other children, while the other educator, Auli, is preparing to go outdoors with the rest of the group. Henry had visited the centre a couple of times with his mother earlier.

The newcomer modifies the daily programme: Initiator

Henry has arrived at the ECEC centre with his mother. ... Tarja (an educator) comes to greet Henry. ... Henry looks into the room where the other children are.

Tarja: 'We're doing our morning activities. Want to go and see?'

The mother puts Henry down. 'Go and see.'

Henry looks from the doorway into the room. ... Henry follows Tarja into the room. Tarja goes to the circle to continue the activity with the other children and invites Henry to join her. Henry walks past the children and educators on the carpet and goes to the shelves at the back of the room.

Tarja: 'You're checking it out. Go ahead. First day. You go and explore.'

Henry has gone to play with the toy kitchen at the back of the room and is leaning over to look at the oven.

Tarja [to the other children]: ‘Hey, why don’t we do it this way, that the others stay here and play [with me] ... you and Auli go and get dressed [in your outdoor clothes] and we’ll get to know each other a bit here [while you dress yourself].’

Part of the group moves into the hallway to get dressed.

Henry examines the soft toys on the shelf and drops them on the floor.

Tarja: ‘Yeah, it’s OK.’

Tarja [calls the other child]: ‘Are you coming to say hi to Henry? ... Does Henry want to check out the stuffed toy basket? That’s fine.’

Tarja comes over to Henry by the shelf, takes down a box from the shelf and puts it on the floor. Tarja and the children check out the soft toy basket together. Henry goes to check out the children’s table and chairs.

Henry’s mother chats with Tarja for a bit longer and then leaves. Tarja moves to sit on the floor next to the soft-toy basket. Tarja comments on the sounds coming from Henry’s book [he has taken it from the bookcase] and moves to sit closer to Henry. Henry sits on the floor and presses the buttons in the book. He listens to the sounds.

Tarja: ‘Nice. Nice song.’ ...

Henry dances along to the music. Tarja does the same.

Henry acts curiously and courageously regarding the new place. He observes other children, and he enters the group room together with the educator. He is actively exploring the place. For a newcomer, active engagement functions as a resource in the pedagogical environment. Both the mother and the educator encourage Henry to go and explore the place. First, the educator invites Henry to join the morning circle, but Henry goes to examine the toys. Henry, as a newcomer, has the freedom to choose toys instead of the morning circle, unlike the other children.

As a result of the educator giving Henry freedom, the pedagogical environment of the whole group of children has started to change. The educator ends the morning circle and follows Henry’s invitation. The educator is ready to modify the daily programme according to the newcomer’s initiatives and her interpretation of the newcomer’s interests. The freedom given to Henry, together with his active engagement, has constructed the space of transition for him, as well as for all who were involved.

This is an example of how the rules related to the daily schedule can be negotiated. Other previously established rules are also flexible: The educator says that it is OK to explore every place because it is Henry’s first day. She also supports the unpacking of toy boxes. At these moments, the space of transition is present in action in a very concrete manner. Henry’s activities as newcomer extend to the group, and other children’s activities are modified according to Henry’s. In action, a newcomer’s freedom to choose what to do and how to take part is emphasised, as well as the newcomer’s active utilisation of resources and initiatives. For Henry, who can utilise his active engagement as a resource, the given privileges form a position of initiator. Henry is encouraged to be active, and by active engagement, Henry enables freedom for himself. Henry’s position in the ECEC environment is determined, on the one hand, by his own actions and resources and, on the other hand, through the actions of others relationally.

The newcomer, Henry, joins the already-existing ECEC pedagogical (physical, social and cultural) environment, which is constantly formed in relations with educators and peers as well as cultural principles. These processes construct the space of transition as a relational process, which happens here to Henry in particular; however, it is also a broader phenomenon in the whole group, shared among the children and educators.

The newcomer's action modifies the rules and norms: Trainee

The next episode is from Helmi's (one-year-old) first day alone in the ECEC. She is playing in a small room with Soili, an educator, and three other slightly older children (Bea, Riku and Siiri). Helmi has played with the other children for over 15 min. Helmi has some Legos for her play, and the educator has also read books with Helmi and another child.

... After the educator reads the book, Helmi returns to the Lego box. Bea is building with Legos.

Bea: 'No.'

Soili (educator): 'No what? Helmi is just watching your play. It doesn't matter.'

Helmi is on all fours on the floor next to Bea's structure. She does not touch it at first but then removes the figure attached to the structure.

Soili: 'Helmi can watch you play for a while.'

Bea: 'No, she can't.'

Helmi throws a piece of the structure farther away.

Soili: 'Bea, Helmi is still small and still practising. The little ones don't know everything yet. Do you remember when you were little and practised? You must give her a chance to practise.'

Bea points in the direction of the Lego thrown by Helmi.

Bea: 'That was in my game.'

Soili: 'Look, Bea, you've got a lot of these blocks here, so you can take a new one from there. It's OK.'

Soili explains to Bea several times that Bea should not mind what Helmi is doing and that Helmi is practising. ... Helmi grabs Bea's Lego structure again. ... Helmi swings the structure towards Bea.

Soili: 'Well, look, Helmi gave it back to you. Helmi is practising give-and-take.'

Helmi throws the structure on the floor in Bea's direction.

Soili: 'Now, fine. Good for Helmi. Well done, Helmi gave it to you.'

Helmi (one-year-old), who doesn't speak yet, is actively constructing the space in the pedagogical environment in this situation, although the verbal interaction takes place between Bea and the educator. Helmi specifically challenges Bea's understanding of appropriate action and rules in ECEC. For Helmi, who is both younger and less experienced as an ECEC child, different issues seem to be possible than for other children in this environment. Age, in particular, is Helmi's resource here. The educator expresses this by talking about Helmi being little. However, Helmi is also engaged, and she actively participates in joint activities like Henry. The educator defends Helmi's unique activity using Helmi's young age, not her position as a newcomer in the group.

Helmi, as a newcomer, is constructing her relations in this group; she is involved with the practices and ideas co-constructing the pedagogical environment. Helmi's participation in this transition situation has resulted in a solution in which the educator gives specific freedom from the rules. Ordinarily, children may not break other children's play or remove toys from others' hand. In this situation, Bea's opposition shows that it is not desirable to break ongoing play already started by others. The episode underlines the teacher's flexible interpretation of the rules and norms, thus contributing to construction of space of transition as not tightly pre-planned pedagogical environment.

As the youngest active one, Helmi takes a position in the space of transition as trainee. The educator emphasises Helmi's young age and things that she is unable to know or do because she is so young, younger than the others, who are expected to tolerate Helmi while she is still training. In addition, this extract describes how the newcomer's presence adjusts not only her relations but all participants' involvement in the situation.

The newcomer as a skilful participant: Participant

The next episode is from Helmi's (one-year-old) first lunch. Helmi uses the eating skills she has acquired previously as a resource.

Helmi is sitting in a highchair. Another child is eating at the same table. ... Soili (educator) brings Helmi a trainer cup with milk in it. Helmi immediately grabs the cup. Soili goes out of the picture. Helmi puts the cup in her mouth with one hand. The spout hits her on the cheek first, but she gets it into her mouth and drinks. Helmi drinks milk in many draughts. A child's voice is heard nearby, and Helmi starts to follow the situation. She keeps the cup of milk in her hand at all times. Sometimes she drinks, and sometimes she chews the spout of the cup. Soili brings Helmi a piece of bread. She puts the bread in front of Helmi. Helmi looks at the bread.

Soili: 'Let's put the cup of milk in there, like that.'

She takes the cup from Helmi and puts it on the table next to the bread. Soili leaves Helmi again. ... Helmi eats the bread; sometimes, she looks around.

You can hear Soili's voice: 'Well done, Helmi, you're doing great.'

Helmi continues to eat the bread. Soili brings the meal, still chopping it up on the plate.

Soili: 'Try a bit of that. Let's maybe get the salad.'

Soili leaves again. Helmi continues to eat the bread. Then, she grabs the spoon with her other hand without putting the bread down. Soili comes to the table with another plate of food.

Soili says to Helmi: 'You know what, Helmi, let's swap the spoon for a smaller one. It might be a bit easier.'

At the same time, she puts a spoonful of food into Helmi's mouth. Helmi grabs the new spoon. ... Helmi puts a piece of potato in her mouth with the spoon. Then, she taps the spoon on the plate where the potato and sauce are. The bread is always in one hand, and she tastes it from time to time. The spoon stays in her left hand. ...

Soili's voice: 'Well done, Helmi, you're doing great.' ...

With the spoon in one hand and the piece of bread in the other, Helmi leans over the plate and tries to get the food directly into her mouth.

The educator serves the food items one by one to Helmi: first milk, then bread and last, the plate with potatoes, sauce and salad. The detailed description denotes how Helmi is engaged and active all the time. While her eating skills need lots of practice, she still uses them purposefully as resources. The milk cup does not reach her mouth every time, and potatoes fall from the spoon, but she continues patiently. The educator supports her with encouragement when she is not able to be next to Helmi. In the space of transition, Helmi's eating skills provide a way to participate in eating situations with others, and although it is her first day in ECEC, the situation moves forward smoothly. Helmi can exercise the skills she has acquired elsewhere, and she is able to transfer them to this new situation. The encouraging educator recognises that Helmi has the skills to manage in this situation. Mastering cultural practices related to eating is utilised here as a resource. Helmi recognises what is expected in the situation and what she can do.

In this situation, Helmi's position as a newcomer is not especially emphasised, even though the transition process from home to ECEC is just beginning. In the previous vignette, Helmi's position was trainee, but here, she is in the position of participant, along the same lines as other children in the group. The space of transition also nearly dissolves in this situation into the flow of daily activities in the pedagogical environment. However, the educator's constant observation and feedback for Helmi indicates that there is specific focus on Helmi during this process of transition thus, contributing to construction of space of transition. It is important to note that young newcomers are not beginners all the time or in all situations.

Discussion and conclusions

Applying social-spatial lenses and relational ontologies of spatiality (Massey, 2005; Raittila, 2012), this article explored young children's first transition from home to ECEC as a socially and spatially embedded phenomenon. The main purpose has been to understand and explore the interlinked nature of the ECEC pedagogical environment and the space of transition, both of which are processual in nature and intertwined in their construction processes. In addition, we studied how the construction of the space of transition could be described. To achieve this, we focused on children's active involvement in the construction process of the space of ECEC during their first day in ECEC. In particular, we used the resources and positions of newcomers as the focus of the analysis. In this discussion, we outlined and accumulated our results containing descriptions of the construction of the space of transition.

Resources and positions were both determined relationally and situationally and gained their value/meaning in social situations, that is in relations with others. As Hognestad and Bøe (2012) emphasised, using a relational spatial ontology means focusing on relations *in* something rather than relations *to* something. Thus, our analysis expressed something not only about the newcomers but also about the pedagogical environment and how the space of transition is constructed.

The results show the process and dynamics of how the space of transition is constructed relationally within the pedagogical environment of ECEC and how all members of the group are involved in it (Massey, 2005; see also Rutanen et al., 2022). In our analysis from the first days in ECEC, the space of transition was activated when a newcomer entered the group. The newcomers utilised their resources and positions and constructed their individual transition processes and, at the same time, the pedagogical environment of the whole group. The newcomer also transformed the old group members' space. Changes occurred at three levels: the individual, the relationship and the context (Niesel and Griebel, 2007). The space of transition could be revealed especially in the observation of how 'the new group', including the newcomer, became organised. The newcomer's

participation elicited issues that might not occur otherwise in the group, and the interaction also made the cultural practices and expectations, often also norms and rules, observable in the ECEC pedagogical environment. The construction of the space of transition was not linear, but different aspects defined the newcomer and the institution and their relations.

Newcomers are typically given positive individual attention in ECEC on their first day by the educators (Can et al., 2023; Lucas Revilla et al., 2023). Our analysis shows similar attention and presence by the educators. On a child's first day in ECEC, the position of newcomer can give the child access to certain special resources and locations, such as lap (Lucas Revilla et al., 2022). Position is status defined in a situation of transition. The newcomers' diverse positions namely, initiator, trainee, participant, were linked to the positive atmosphere of the space of transition, but also centrally to children's possibilities to contribute to the situation. The newcomers were allowed to be proactive in their own way, using their own resources and those arising from the situation. Somewhat similar focus on relational positions of newcomers can be found in different sociocultural approaches with a focus on activities and joint cultural practices (see e.g. Rogoff, 1995).

The resources the newcomers utilised during their first days (e.g. age, existing skills, engagement) bring new light to the children's strengths instead of focusing the children's adaptation to a new environment (Brooker, 2008; Dalli, 1999). The resources utilised and created during the first day offer support for perceiving the transition not solely as a crisis or challenging period, as previous studies have often portrayed it (Datler et al., 2010; Nystad et al., 2021) but also as an opportunity for newcomers to actively engage in reshaping daily practices within the pedagogical environment of ECEC. However, this requires that the existing ECEC pedagogical environment be flexible with regard to the activities and initiatives shown by the newcomer. Thus, educators' professional expertise also plays an important role in the co-construction of the space of transition. The flexibility of educators' interpretations of cultural practices is the key principle through which newcomers' initiatives can be accepted, even if they are contrary to conventional practices. The educators gave specific freedom within customary practices and encouraged newcomers to pursue actions that were not usually approved. Thus, the newcomers were given the opportunity to influence and even direct the activities through which the space of transition was shaped.

We have shown how newcomers, along with others in the ECEC group, co-construct the space of transition (Fuller and Löw, 2017). Newcomers bring new ways of being in relations for all in the ECEC pedagogical environment, and within the pedagogical environment a space of transition emerges for a period. When the newcomer has become 'one of us' after some time, the space of transition merges into the pedagogical environment of ECEC.

Approaching transition with the concept of space creates the opportunity to show how children themselves actively construct their own everyday lives, how relational spatial processes construct children's lives and how spatial practices and childhood are determined in joint action (Holloway and Valentine, 2000).

Our methodological approach in this study is based on case analysis and the use of detailed examples from the data as a basis for illustrating our theoretical view and approach to transitions. Our intention is not to create generalisable knowledge of a process that occurs to all children undergoing their first transition to ECEC but to provide a fuller understanding of transition interpreted through social-spatial lenses and relational ontology (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013). The results should be interpreted in this context, providing insights into processes instead of drawing wider conclusions to be generalised to a range of cases. However, the results show how social-spatial processes are ongoing in ECEC groups when transition occurs.

With these data, our interpretations are limited to a specific point in time, as our observations did not cover, for example, the time before the first day in ECEC. To address this limitation, the analysis focused on the construction of space in ECEC on the first day. We acknowledge that the space of

transition cannot be limited to a specific point, for example analysing only children's first day. It would be interesting to follow the actions and events prior to the first day to get a fuller picture of how the space of transition starts to be constructed and how it turns into a so-called ordinary ECEC pedagogical environment. This is a direction in which the work should continue.

Despite their ambiguity, the concepts of resource and position, which were used as analysis tools, were appropriate for producing a description of the children's own opportunities to participate in the construction of the transition space. Even if this focus allowed us to shed light to only some of the various aspects and dynamic processes present in transition space, the relational nature of these concepts was consistent with the ontological starting point chosen for the study. Resources and positions could be used in the further elaboration of the concept of the space of transition, but other tools with a relational nature (like affordance) could also deepen our knowledge about the space of transition.

The social-spatial lenses of a child's first transition from home to ECEC underline the situated construction of space in which all the people present take part. The construction of a space of transition does not occur in a vacuum but is embedded in the particular social-cultural-historical-material context, which is conceptualised here as the ECEC pedagogical environment. Children themselves are active in making and remaking their everyday space through resources and embodied practices (Ormmalm, 2021), thus actively forming and contributing to their process of transition from home to ECEC (Lucas Revilla et al., 2023). This view of the child as a central and active actor in the transition process is important. The child enters to a pedagogical environment, which determines the transition in a significant way. However, the environment is also defined by children, and this is important to take into account in the transition research.


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