

## **WELL-BEING AND BELONGING DURING EARLY EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS**

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### **Abstract**

*This study identifies and explores some of the issues surrounding the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 in a school in England (from age 5 to age 6.) Data were gathered from teachers, parents and children through questionnaires, interviews and observation of practice. The conclusions drawn are that personal social and emotional well-being and developing a sense of belonging to the school community are significant factors in the transition process in terms of the impact this has on children's learning. Informative communication with all those involved is a central element in the transition process if children's well-being is to be supported effectively and continuity of learning uninterrupted.*

### **Introduction**

Fabian and Dunlop (2005, p.229) state that educational transitions are marked by "intense and accelerated developmental demands" the effects of which can be long term because a child's introduction to, and early experience of, school can influence future attitudes to learning and subsequent educational achievement. While Page (2000) suggests that allowing children to experience discontinuity is seen by some as part of the continuum of life and learning, children can become disaffected, disorientated and inhibited (Fisher, 1996), resulting in behavioural problems which impact on commitment, motivation and relationships (Kienig, 2002). The transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 might not be seen as a "major landmark" (Brooker and Broadbent, 2003, p.38) compared to the transition into school and between other phases of education, but the change in pedagogical philosophy at this transition can cause confusion which might result in discontinuity of learning (Fabian & Woodcock, 2004). While change can be stimulating if it does not make things so different as to cause confusion it is the nature of the support offered that sees children through, by preventing any lack of continuity from becoming significant (Fabian, 2002).

This paper explores some of the issues surrounding transition from the Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1 (from age 5 to age 6) and the significance of this process in children's lives and learning. A rural Cheshire Primary School was selected with the aim of identifying the key factors influencing transition from the Foundation Stage into year 1 of Key Stage 1 including the contribution made by the staff, environment, parents and the children themselves to the process. The research is based on the experiences of the pupils in the 2004/05 Reception and Year 1 classes of the selected school, providing data from those about to undertake this transition and those who have most recently been through that process.

### **Transition and its significance in children's lives and learning**

#### Emotional well-being

A lack of emotional well-being limits the ability to build relationships and become active participants in life and learning (Roffey & O'Reirdan, 2001; Porter, 2003). Emotional well-being depends on a positive sense of self that develops from feeling confident, secure, valued, respected and cared about, being able to reciprocate such feelings and self-manage emotions

(Goleman, 1996). Although Goleman has been criticised for his strong emphasis on emotional health (Weare, 2004), the emotional well being of children is now accepted as fundamental to all round growth and development. Emotional stability, positive attitudes and the ability to communicate effectively are seen as essential foundations for learning (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000) (QCA) because secure and happy children are able to fully participate in, and engage with, the educational challenges confronting them (Burrell & Bubb, 2000). In short, emotional well-being empowers children as learners.

Such emotional well-being in young children is, however, vulnerable. Even happy, secure children may find the transition into school overwhelming (Fabian, 2002). Change can be destabilising and disruptive, causing insecurity and anxiety (O'Hara, 2000). Where uncertainty continues the resulting stress can impact negatively on emotional security and ability to engage with learning opportunities (Roffey & O'Reirdan, 2001). Learning what to do with others is important and supports inclusion into a community. Not feeling foolish is acknowledged by Edgington (2004) to contribute to a positive self-image.

A lack of emotional well-being can cause worry and stress leading to aggression, fatigue and withdrawal, all of which have the potential to impair learning capacity (Featherstone, 2004). Self-assured children are able to conform to the social demands of individual settings and are more likely to experience academic success (Goleman, 1996). The 'Healthy Schools Standard' launched in the UK in 1999 and the framework for 'Personal Social and Health Education' further recognises the importance of children's emotional health and the need to provide them with the skills and attitudes that support and promote social inclusion and active participation (Department for Education and Skills, 1999-2003; National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2004). Emotionally literate and resilient children are better equipped to manage change than those who are not (Dunlop, 2003; Fabian, 2002).

### Partnership

Transitions from home to pre-school and pre-school to school are usually supported by planned strategies involving home, professionals and the setting(s) to ensure continuity and that children's needs are met appropriately. Although parental interest and involvement may appear to diminish as children move from the Foundation Stage, Brooker and Broadbent (2003) believe links between the child's communities continue to be critical at each transition.

Preparation for transition must be effective, proactive and overt if children are to benefit and experience smooth transitions (Bayley & Featherstone, 2003). The best tools to achieve this are discussion, experience and activity with the aim of levelling out difference. Co-construction and partnership are central to this process (Broström, 2003; Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Griebel & Niesel, 2003; Margetts, 2003).

As children exist in a series of interconnected communities, partnership between those involved is essential to achieve an effective transition (Broström, 2003). To belong is critical and as children move from one community to another, they will be helped if those communities are bridged. Visible, active partnerships with parents support transition (Margetts, 2002; Neuman, 2002). Communication is central to the ability of partnerships to provide effective support and has a positive impact on development (Fabian, 2002); therefore teachers need to engage with each other to bridge the gap between settings, classes and phases to benefit the child (O'Hara, 2000; Drake, 2001). Continuity of friendship groups also provide stability at times of transition, while 'buddy' systems and older siblings may act as a link with the wider school community (Margetts, 2002; O'Hara, 2000), helping children engage with a new environment.

### The learning environment

By ensuring that aspects of the learning environment are familiar to children in a physical or practical context they are likely to become confident and have a sense of control over their lives.

Andreski and Nicholls (1999) describe the environment as the background to the curriculum. Young children learn best when actively engaged in a stimulating environment (Page, 2000; QCA, 2000). The whole learning environment, both inside and out, therefore should be structured to be learner friendly and encourage active involvement.

Laevers, Vandebussche, Kog & Depondt, (1997, p.15) wrote that children who feel “like fish in water” in an environment have the ability to maximise learning potential. Edgington (2004) speaks of the need for children to feel at home before being able to branch out. The aim must be to provide an environment that inspires “an eagerness to explore and a zest for learning” (Drake, 2001, p.1). Environments should be relevant and inclusive (Edgington, 2004). When children’s lives and communities are reflected in the environments in which they operate, emotional well being is safe and secure.

### Curriculum continuity

Much of the focus on educational transitions emphasises the link with future academic attainment (Educationnortheast, 2005; IFF Research Ltd, 2004). When introduced in England and Wales, the National Curriculum aimed to raise achievement by providing a common curriculum through a specific framework designed to promote continuity between each of its four phases (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1996). The Foundation Stage is independent of that framework and formulated to “underpin future learning” and prepare children for Key Stage 1 (QCA, 2000, p.8). Each educational transition marks the beginning of a new phase of childhood and future development. This is particularly so when children leave the child-centred Foundation Stage, designed to build firm foundations for future success, to enter the curriculum driven Key Stage 1 (Brooker & Broadbent, 2003). In terms of cognitive development McClure (2002, p.91) wrote that children entering formal learning environments faced with tasks bearing no resemblance to their previous experiences are likely to “feel uncomfortable and may not engage with the tasks at all.” Although the content of the National Curriculum is defined, there is flexibility of teaching methods, allowing suitable challenges to be set that respond to individual needs (Shuttleworth, 2001).

The Plowden Report (Department of Education and Science, 1967, p.193) described play as the “principal means of learning in early childhood.” Many authors upheld this recognition of the value of play, including Wood and Bennett (1997, p.22) who described play as essential to development and an “educationally powerful process”. Fabian and Dunlop (2005, p.240) considered the advantages of using play as a tool in the transition process, concluding that play has potential as an “important mechanism . . . for continuity and progression in learning.”

There are several conclusions to be drawn from the literature. The evidence points to educational transition being a complex issue that must be planned and prepared for in order to take into account children’s needs and experiences (Dunlop, 2003) through discussion, activity, and partnership. Building bridges between the child’s past experiences and communities and those in the future level out change. Planning for continuity is therefore an important factor in successful transitions, cognitively, emotionally and socially. Fabian and Dunlop (2002) describe the emotional well being of pupils and the cognitive progression of pupils as “mutual influences” dependent on one another to move forwards successfully. Consideration of these two strands is likely to determine the significance of transitions in children’s lives and the relevance of transitions in children’s learning.

## **Research Methodology**

The research centred on the perceptions of the Year 1 parents, the experience and practice of the staff and observations undertaken at the school in respect of the transition from the Foundation Stage into year 1 of Key Stage 1. A rural Cheshire Primary School with 188 pupils was selected as the case-study setting, with the focus being the reception and year 1 classes of 28 and 21 children, respectively. Two qualified teachers and two classroom assistants staff the reception class, where, each day one teacher and one classroom assistant are present. One full-time teacher, assisted by a full-time classroom assistant teaches year 1.

Sixteen parents participated in the study by completing questionnaires. Seven of these were interviewed to achieve a greater understanding of the issues involved. Three teachers also completed questionnaires; two were also interviewed.

The objectives of this study were to identify and explore some of the key issues surrounding educational transitions with a view to:

- determining the significance of the transition at the end of the Foundation Stage on children's well-being and subsequent impact on their learning;
- identifying activities and strategies that are likely to support continuity and emotional well-being.

Qualitative data were collected from the identified stakeholders (children, parents, and teachers) and the setting. The sample was non-random due to the restrictions imposed by the size of the setting. Restrictions on the sample size limit the applicability of the research and the conclusions drawn. As Bell (1999) points out, obtaining sufficient data to make generalised comments is difficult in small-scale studies. However, using a variety of methods to collect data balanced this by providing a broader basis upon which to draw, thus increasing the reliability of both analysis and conclusions. Questionnaires, interviews and observations were judged to be appropriate tools for collecting the data required with the benefit of increasing the likelihood of providing balanced, reasoned and reliable conclusions (Costello, 2003).

Questionnaires used a sliding Likert-type scale, adapted from Bell (1999), against which respondents could measure their replies. The questionnaires were piloted and amended in accordance with feedback, then distributed to the parents of year 1 and the reception and year 1 teachers. The teachers' questionnaires related to the management of transitions from the school perspective while the parents' questionnaire considered two areas; the initial transition into reception in September 2003 and the subsequent transition into year 1 in September 2004.

The questionnaires (distributed in January 2005) focused on parental perceptions of how these transitions were managed by their children and the school. Sixteen questionnaires were returned. All sixteen of those children had attended one or more pre-school settings. Replies also indicated that seven children had an older sibling at the school, while the older brother of one child had left the school at the end of the previous term. Of the remaining eight children, seven were the eldest child of the family and one was an only child.

An initial interrogation of the returned questionnaires identified responses that could be developed further and seven parents were selected for interviews (during February and March 2005) including the parents of:

- two children identified as unenthusiastic to return to school in September 2004.
- a child not thought to be ready for school.
- two of the youngest children.
- two of the oldest children.

In all, the parents of five boys and two girls were selected.

The interviews were planned and designed to augment the questionnaires and gain a better understanding of the parents' perceptions of the transition process for their children. A written schedule devised to structure and moderate the interviews was provided to the interviewees in advance, giving them notice of the areas of focus. Key words were recorded during the interviews and full notes made immediately afterwards. This allowed eye contact, engagement with the subject and demonstrated value was placed on their contributions.

The teacher's questionnaire was completed by the two reception teachers and the year 1 teacher and focused on policy and arrangements for transition from the Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1. These questionnaires were supplemented by interviews with the two reception teachers and the observations carried out in January and February 2005.

Classroom observations provided opportunities to cross-check perceptions and comments collected during the research process. Over a five week period, between January and February 2005, the curriculum, practice, continuous provision and the possible influence of the environment in the reception and year 1 classes were observed at first hand. Observing children with their teachers provided first hand experience of the approach to the curriculum and teaching techniques. Observed similarities and differences between the reception and year 1 classrooms were also recorded as part of the analysis of practice and to identify aspects of continuity/discontinuity.

## **Main Findings**

The learning environment, teachers' perspectives and practice (influencing transitional experiences) provide the background against which the other results are assessed and are therefore considered first. Within the school as a whole, relationships with children were observed to be valued and that every effort was made to get to know all the children. This was managed partly because the school is relatively small (188 pupils), through playground duty and shared assemblies. Joint ventures with year 1 particularly school trips, productions and assemblies also help to make links with the next stage of learning.

### **Teachers' perspectives**

In reception, learning objectives are framed according to the 'Early Learning Goals' of the Foundation Stage, however, if appropriate, individuals are introduced to the Key Stage 1 curriculum early. Similarly, where necessary, pupils in year 1 are supported appropriately to achieve completion of the Early Learning Goals. Active learning was observed to be planned for and encouraged wherever possible, giving children first hand concrete experiences. Ongoing continuous provision and interactive tabletop displays in both classes complemented adult led activities (for example, role-play).

The teachers agreed that, although no formal policy for transition existed, children were prepared for the transition through familiarisation and support, utilising similar strategies each year, such as visiting the year 1 class (although parents did not feel visits alone were sufficient preparation). Account is taken of individual and group characteristics and needs when formulating appropriate strategies.

The reception teachers confirmed (when interviewed) that the Foundation Profiles completed in reception for each pupil is shared with the year 1 teacher. Further the close working relationship between the staff, who meet regularly to discuss relevant issues, contributes to continuity and progression in transition. Although two teachers job share the teaching

responsibility for reception, they plan together, keep a daily diary and meet regularly to maintain continuity and progress.

### Partnership

The school recognises the contribution of parental involvement to children’s learning and support emotional well-being. An initiative known as ‘Clubs’ was introduced and take place one morning a week (in reception and throughout Key Stage 1). Parents are invited into school to assist in a number of informal learning opportunities through a variety of creative and interactive activities. Information about progress is reported to parents verbally twice yearly and by written report at the end of the academic year.

### The learning environment

The learning environment draws in all aspects of provision including planning, practice, academic curriculum and the physical and emotional environment for learning. Practice in reception and year 1 was observed to be positive, creative and active whenever possible. In year 1 children accepted what was demanded of them, the greater adjustment took place in reception, where children were assigned to activities rather than choosing their own. This was perhaps the most difficult adjustment to school, although the same curriculum framework applied in reception as pre-school.

TABLE 1 The physical learning environment

Observation	Reception Class	Year 1 Class
Self-contained	Yes	Yes
Well Lit	Yes	Yes
Wall Displays	Exhibited children’s work and linked to topics	Some children’s work displayed, most were designed as tools to aid learning
Interactive Displays	Yes	No
Role Play	Yes, linked to topic	Yes, linked to topic
Sand	Yes	No
Whole Group Lessons	Yes	Yes
Activity Based Learning	Yes, children rotated around set activities, some free choice.	Yes, but whole class more likely to be engaged on same activity. Less free choice.
Whiteboard	Yes, small, movable	Yes, large, fixed and interactive
Formal Activities	Yes, but recording was made pictorially with some ‘writing.’	Yes, increased demand to record formally and accurately through writing.
‘Clubs’	Yes	Yes
Library	Yes, parents help	Yes, parents help

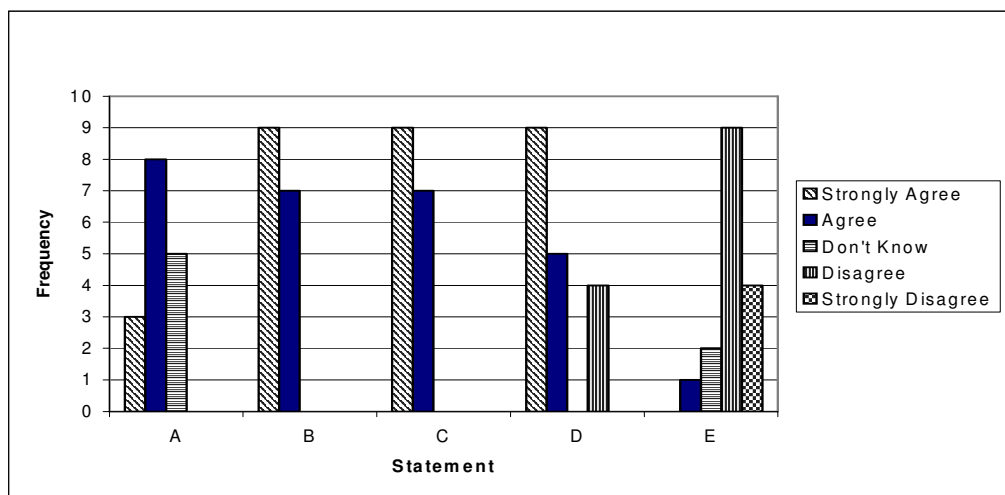
The recorded observations suggest continuity is provided in reception and year 1 through similarities of learning environment, teaching style and experience.

### Parents’ perspectives

To enable a comparison to be drawn between the initial transition and the next, the first three statements on the questionnaire focused on the transition into reception and how parents perceived the extent to which their child was ready for and adjusted to school. Initial interrogation of the completed questionnaires showed that most children were perceived by their parents as ready for school and settled easily into school life. Eight of the nine, whose parents ‘strongly agreed’ that they were ready for school, settled easily, one child in this group did not. The two children not agreed as ready for school had difficulty settling.

Ten children were considered to have adjusted to school life without difficulty, while the parents of one child could not say. Five children however found it difficult to adapt to the demands of school. During interviews with parents the difficulties were associated with the structure of the school day and playtimes and attachment to main carers. Of these five, three were children strongly agreed to be ready for school and two as not ready. The difficulties of two children (relating to attachment and structure of day) were of short duration.

The second aspect addressed by the questionnaire asked parents to reflect on the transition into year 1 giving an indication of their perceptions of this transition. The results are summarised by statements A – E in Figure 1.



Key	Statement
A	Children are helped in preparing to move up into Year 1
B	My child looked forward to moving up to Class 2
C	The thought of having a new teacher excited and pleased my child
D	My child was enthusiastic to return to school in September 2004
E	My child has missed some of the activities from Reception

FIGURE 1 The transition into Year 1

The data indicated that all the respondents’ children looked forward to moving into year 1 and were pleased and excited about having a new teacher, however, five parents could not say if their children were helped in preparing for the transition. However, as the 2004 summer vacation drew to an end, two of the children were unenthusiastic about returning to school in September.

Analysis of the interviews revealed that the common factors identified by parents reflecting on the initial transition into school and subsequently into Key Stage 1, related to personal, social and emotional development. The factors impacting on this were most commonly perceived to relate to physical maturity, integrating into, and understanding of, the school community, rules and culture and academic demands.

**The child’s physical and emotional capacity to manage the school day and the environment**

Interviews with parents revealed that for the youngest children, particularly, their physical capability to manage the school day and its environment was a contributory factor. This continued to be an issue throughout reception for one of the youngest children who found the days to be long and struggled with the requirement for him to sit at a table to participate in adult initiated activities. Although the school operated a policy of one intake per academic

year, reception children could attend half days for the first four weeks, providing they stayed at school for the lunch period, enabling them to be inducted into the lunchtime routine with their peers.

Four parents felt the lack of structure at 'playtimes' was very difficult for the children. For one child (not viewed as ready for school at the start of the reception year) this continued to be an unresolved issue in year 1. The overall perception of the parents is that the children did not know what to do in the absence of equipment and direct supervision (such as at pre-school), contrasting sharply with the 'controlled' nature of the rest of the school day. Parents did not see this daily transition as smooth, nor was it felt that the school appreciated the significance of this in terms of comfort and confidence. Observations confirmed that the reception children mixed with years 1 and 2 at playtimes and that no equipment or adult interaction was available at such times.

The ability of the child to cope with the behavioural, emotional and social demands of Key Stage 1

'Coping' was raised by all of the parents who saw school as demanding different behaviours than had previously been experienced. Most parents saw and accepted reception as a means through which children are familiarised with the social culture of school. Two parents described it as crowd control; three as learning to learn. Five parents felt their children relied on routine for security, including knowing what was going to happen, when and how.

Parents wanted children to be happy; believing unhappiness in school made an impact on life at home, but most did not appreciate that emotional health could impact on cognitive success. One parent noted that an emphasis on the negative aspects of her child's behaviour at school had caused a regression of personal and emotional behaviour at home and affected the child's willingness to go to school and participate in activities and learning.

All parents felt that in year 1 the ethos of the class changed towards cognitive learning rather than social development but were not always aware of their child's changing needs.

On the whole, the reception teachers were seen as authoritarian, whose purpose was to establish boundaries and behavioural norms. Although one parent described them as 'intimidating' this view was not widely held. One parent felt that too much emphasis on negative behaviour in reception caused a loss of confidence and self-worth, only resolved when the child moved class. Several parents indicated a personal preference for one reception teacher and saw job sharing as a potential threat to children's security and a source of discontinuity and confusion.

Without exception parents reported that prior to transition, children had a positive impression of the year 1 teacher, favourably influencing attitudes towards the transition into Key Stage 1. Parental observations included a sense of warmth and of a relaxed frame of mind on the part of this teacher. On the evidence, two of the three children who made a poor transition into school made a successful transition into year 1. The parents of these two children attributed this in part to the personality of the year 1 teacher.

What the parents did not receive was information from the school about how the move would be managed into year 1 either academically or emotionally, which contrasted with their experience of starting school and the induction process.

Parents stated that school endeavoured to become a familiar place to the children. This included all of the staff making an effort to get to know all of the new children by name and by acknowledging them around school. Assemblies were a shared responsibility and provided an opportunity for the children to meet other members of staff and see themselves as part of the wider school community.



Relationships with peers were seen as influential, and transition into school within a friendship group was seen as significant and a settling factor. During reception, friendship groups shifted and extended for most children. However, one child was not thought to have successfully integrated socially, into the class group by his parent. This parent felt the child's social skills were not well developed when he started school and felt subsequent development had not kept pace with demands placed on him, causing unhappiness and reluctance to go to school. Play times remained difficult for him compared with his peers throughout reception and into year 1. Strategies recently implemented to promote self-esteem and confidence have produced immediate results in terms of the child's well-being and attitudes towards school.

Many parents mentioned the mentoring of reception by year 6 pupils, a process that begins before the children start school through letters home welcoming the new intake. Year 6 pupils supported younger children, escorting them in from the playground and read with or to them.

#### Curriculum continuity

Although two parents expressed concern at what they perceived to be excessive academic demands, especially within reception, there was a general lack of knowledge about academic expectations and curricular. None of the parents were aware that the academic curriculum in reception was essentially the same as the pre-school settings attended. In year 1 only one child reported missing some of the messy, creative activities more freely available in reception.

### **Discussion of findings**

Dowling (1995) viewed starting school and early school experiences as a critical transition that can profoundly affect learning and behaviour, setting the tone for a lifetime of learning. The literature review identified that educational transitions are complex, requiring planning and preparation to ensure the emotional well-being of children and subsequent academic progression by levelling out change through continuity of experience. The main findings of the empirical research identify active learning, similarities of approach and environment together with parental involvement are strong aspects of continuity in provision.

Active learning and continuous provision were observed to be planned and encouraged wherever possible, giving children the first hand concrete experiences, recognised as vital in both the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 to provide relevant, meaningful and continuity of learning opportunities (Edgington, 2004). Only one child complained that some activities were not as freely available in year 1 as in reception. By inference, this suggests that there were more similarities than differences in provision. This supports the view that where change is levelled out, children benefit (McClure, 2002). Teachers rejected the view that the reception job share adversely affected both quality and continuity of provision, citing the close and effective relationship and strategies implemented. The observations did not contradict these assertions.

The 'Clubs' initiative allowed parents to see the active approach to learning and to get to know their 'school' child. Furthermore seeing parents and teachers working together promotes a sense of well-being for children bridging the gap between home and school supporting transitions (Margetts, 2002). The continuance of this scheme from reception into Key Stage 1 also provides continuity of approach and experience.

Most parents commented on a perceived emphasis of children being prepared (behaviourally) to learn in reception and of learning in year 1. Learning the rules and values of new settings is critical to developing understanding and feelings of belonging and essential if the frustration and emotional burden of misapprehension and exclusion is to be avoided (Edgington, 2004).

The practice of peer mentoring supported the integration of reception children into the school community, promoting a caring ethos, a sense of belonging and therefore emotional well-being.

As children move into a new curriculum and meet the increased demands placed upon them in year 1, relevant and possibly different strategies of support and nurturing help them accommodate change and respond to it positively. This may be explained by the changing needs of the group as they face and accommodate new challenges in Key Stage 1 as part of their educational development (Edgington, 2004).

Overall, the evidence suggests that these similarities of approach and support strategies impact positively on emotional well-being and help mitigate the transition into the formality of the Key Stage 1 curriculum. However, there are other aspects of provision that could lead to some discontinuity of experience.

It is sometimes overlooked that the 'curriculum' is not confined to the academic aspects of provision. Feeling secure at playtime, lunchtime and assembly contributes to the overall experience of the child and is important from a social perspective. The implications of this for children are serious. A lack of social inclusion can undermine emotional security and a child's ability to access learning (Roffey & O'Reirdan, 2001). The contrast between a lack of structure at playtimes with the rest of the school day was seen as damaging to their child's emotional well-being by some parents. Discussion of these issues with the school may have raised awareness and led to a more rapid resolution of any difficulties.

Partnership with parents, as identified by the literature review contributes to successful transitions between the communities of the child. Bringing parents into school is an important aspect of this, but must be underpinned by effective communication. For example, reception was seen as a big step up by parents, despite the curriculum for pre-school provision and reception being based on the same document. This lack of understanding of the curriculum followed could easily be addressed by a more effective exchange of information, both prior to and during the school year.

This suggests a lack of effective and reciprocal communication within the partnership of home and school advocated as crucially beneficial to development (Fabian, 2002).

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of educational transitions on children's well-being and subsequent learning. The empirical research indicates that parents see personal, social and emotional development as a particularly significant factor in their children's lives and that this strongly influences the nature of their educational experience. However, parents value happiness in its own right rather than as a factor in academic achievement.

Teachers saw their role as providing an environment conducive to learning. As part of that, the children's sense of belonging to the community of school is positively nurtured and development viewed as a continual process. Communication and co-operation between the staff is agreed as necessary to support the transition process with planning an inherent part of this, although an overt policy to support the process is not deemed essential.

Visible partnerships with parents are encouraged; however, parents indicated uncertainty in respect of curricula expectations and the transition processes. Building a picture of what is to come is likely to be helpful for parents and children alike and promote enthusiasm and support familiarisation visits.

In this study three of the children made a poor transition into reception, this manifested in their home life and relationships. Two struggled to make the social transition and one (the youngest) struggled both socially and academically. These issues continued throughout the year and in the parents' view were inadequately identified and addressed by the school. The transition into year 1 for two of these children was much more successful. The ethos of the class and the personality of the teacher were seen by the parents as contributing to this significantly. The third child has continuing issues socially and emotionally, causing him to be less outgoing and confident; he does not look forward to going to school. Although these issues are now being addressed, this evidences Dowling's (1995) view that early transitions and experiences can set the tone for future attitudes and achievement. Helping children become familiar with the culture and environment to facilitate acceptance and understanding is central to belonging. In this school, playground buddies might help some of the younger children adjust and feel at home.

Although a small-scale study, the importance of social and emotional well-being in providing a firm foundation from which children can explore and become active learners with a sense of ownership and community, is identified by the literature review and supported by the data collated. The poor transition of three children into reception (and also into year 1 for one child) and subsequent impact on their home life demonstrates how the child's communities inter-link, just as their emotional and cognitive development is interdependent. Transfer into year 1 may not be a landmark transition (Brooker and Broadbent, 2003), but if not managed appropriately can have long term consequences and may alienate a child if there is insufficient real and visible continuity to bridge the gap between past and present (O'Hara, 2000). Children need to be ready to learn what is offered and taught the culture as well as bringing their culture to it, or there is a risk to self-worth and confidence. This may be especially relevant for younger (summer born) children. This issue of getting ready to learn was beyond the scope of this present study, but is a possible avenue for further research.

Whilst this study has deepened understanding of relevant issues in transition and will benefit future practice through an increased awareness, there is scope to extend it further. There remain many more questions to be asked, particularly about the relevance of the environment, teachers' roles in personal, social and emotional development, the agency and voice of the child and the impact that job sharing might have on continuity, well-being and development.

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