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Reviewing Educational Transitions: Moving from the Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1



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Pascal (2002) has suggested that a child's experience during their early years is a critical determinant for their future progress and attainment educationally, economically, and as a member of their social community. This means serious attention needs to be focused on ensuring every child's experience of transferring across the increasing number of early years settings is as positive as possible.

Introduction

Children generally move from one level to another during their educational careers, in a series of transitions (foundation stage to primary, primary to secondary etc). The foundation stage and primary school education (key stage 1 and 2) are different phases in an educational continuum, with distinct differences in policies, curriculum, teaching methodologies, environment and surroundings, role of parents and finally what is expected of each child (Fabian, 1994; Yeboah, 2002).

Foundation Stage (aged 3 – 5)

The foundation stage curriculum contains the basic aims, tasks and skills that are considered important to be developed in an early years setting. The overall aim is to help children with social and emotional development, to provide children with academic skills and to prepare them for school. This preparation consists of stimulating the child's general development and teaching basic mathematics and reading skills. The most important part of the foundation stage is the child's development and meeting his/her needs.

Key Stage 1 (aged 5 – 7)

Key stage 1 is a more in-depth version of the foundation stage and aims to teach children the skills that are considered essential in formal schooling. The curriculum consists of a wider variety of topics, and it is within this key stage that pupils first come across 'official' subjects like history, geography, and art & design. Its aims are to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life.

The transition experience

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory is often used as a framework for theorising transitions. The theory suggests that an adjustment to an institution outside of the family means changes in identity, roles and relations. Therefore, in general the transition has been testified to be a difficult, uncertain and confusing stage in a child's life (See Fabian, 1994; Pratt, 1984; Yeboah, 2002). Margetts (1997) argues that it is one major challenge that every child has to face within their early years, with their overall success regarding the transfer predicting their future social, emotional and academic experiences.

Finally, evidence has shown that although these factors are grouped under different categories they work individually as well as in conjunction with each other. However, the effect of each factor will vary according to each child's personal features (Yeboah, 2002). Therefore, the impact of the transition depends largely upon the individual child's ability to successfully settle; emotionally, psychologically, physically and intellectually into a primary school setting.

Importance of successful transition

Early maladjustment to the formal school setting may create serious problems in the social adjustment of children in other settings (Ladd & Price, 1987). Kienig (2002) suggests this may lead a child to feel deprived of a sense of security and the emotional strain this causes, may disorganise cognitive activities, reduce motor abilities which ultimately will not favour the operation of orientation and exploration reflexes. Furthermore, Kienig (1998) argues that a poor transition may result in behavioural problems and even disharmonies in the child's overall development.

Contributing factors

Research has highlighted a number of factors that can contribute to a maladaptive transition to formal schooling. They can broadly be grouped under three headings. The first group is factors associated with the school. For instance, individual school policies, different school transition programmes, the unique school culture and finally the effects from each different peer group.

Family processes

Secondly, factors associated with the home environment. The quality of the parent-child relationships, influence the development of a wide range of competencies during the early years (Birch & Ladd, 1996). Parent involvement influences a child's feeling of confidence, the child's motivational levels, and the child's ability to perform with a sense of achievement in school (Reynolds, 1992).

Child's characteristics

Thirdly, factors associated with each child's characteristics. For example, a child's temperament can affect how they view themselves and their ability to successfully complete tasks. Children with easy temperaments are typically willing to try things repeatedly and are better able to handle frustrations and challenges. In contrast, children with more difficult temperaments may become more easily frustrated and discouraged by challenges or changes within environments.