

The importance of effective transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 needs to be understood and valued by all those involved in school life. It can result in adopting a whole-school approach based on the Foundation Stage principles and good early years practice. **Diane Rich** explains

Easing transition to Key Stage 1

Transition from Reception to Key Stage 1 in school raises issues which are relevant to transition throughout school life and pre-school, too.

Educators and parents seem either to get children ready for what comes next or get things ready for children. This latter view is supported by the DVD and training materials, *Continuing the Learning Journey* (QCA/05/1590), that was distributed to all schools in 2005. The training package aims to make the move into Key Stage 1 a positive experience for children.

There are several reasons why transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 is not effective. One is the misleading use of the term 'formal learning' which is applied to children moving into Key Stage 1. This has influenced practice in some schools, where there is more teacher control and less child autonomy. The result is Year 1 children who say,

'My teacher doesn't like me. I can't do the work, so my teacher doesn't like me.'

'I thought she'd let us play with the bricks.'

'We have to stay in our chair now and Johnny has to sit still. He's a bad boy now.'

'We just have to do numbers and letters. That's what we do now. I get tired.'

It is not only children who are unhappy with the interpretation of formal learning in Key Stage 1. Parents don't like it either. One parent told me about her concerns when her daughter moved into Year 1.

'When Katie was in the Reception class she loved it at school. It carried on from the nursery really but one change was that we had things to do at home.'

'At first I was worried, but they were great fun things. I remember 'make a den' and 'find the biggest potato' which we could all be part of. We even used to have meetings for parents about some of the things, with suggestions. We had fun with the things we did. There was no pressure. Now it's all words, worksheets and sitting.'

'We don't really get any clues about what our [parent] approach should be. I know I should go and ask but I don't feel that welcome any more. The teacher says, 'now the children have to do a lot more work'.'

'I don't know why it has to be so different though. Katie was happy before. Now Katie gets stressed and I get stressed. And all the time I keep thinking how little she really is.'

It would be useful to replace the unhelpful term 'formal learning' with the statement 'when all children reach statutory school age'. Although it is wordier, it places the emphasis on learning being formalised in the sense children reaching formal school age. This emphasis might help schools to extend the principles underpinning the Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1.

Some schools prepare children for formal learning while they are still in the Foundation Stage. Grooming children in this way can mean that their early years are no longer underpinned by the principles of the Foundation Stage. The statutory status of the Foundation Stage and its principles are flaunted in the name of transition.

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Looking forward denies children a curriculum which is relevant to them and to ways of working that meet their interests, abilities, age related and individual styles of learning.

Looking back to move on

Instead of looking forward, educators should look back to Foundation Stage practice and learn from it to develop practice in Key Stage 1. Looking back means the Foundation Stage is more likely to influence how children learn in Key Stage 1. It really means getting Key Stage 1 ready for Foundation Stage children.

Looking back will result in year 1 children being in a learning environment that is familiar to them because it will continue to have, for example,:

- opportunities for role play, sand and water, outdoor play,
- dual language displays,
- notice boards for parents,
- a welcoming approach to parents,
- staff working together, well organised
- well organised, accessible resources.

Familiar experiences and children

Effective transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 not only allows Year 1 children to work in a familiar environment but they will also have familiar experiences which include, for example:

- learning through first hand experience
- being listened to
- being observed
- high-quality play
- outdoor provision
- sand and water
- construction
- using all their senses
- freedom to move
- opportunities to work at length and depth
- links in their learning
- learning which is purposeful and has real meaning
- well organised and accessible resources available for children to choose themselves
- opportunities to initiate activities and enquiries and follow up their own interests
- whole school support.

As well as familiar environments and familiar experiences children in

schools where transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 is effective continue to be with familiar people. These include, for example:

- the friends they made in their Reception class or Foundation Stage unit
- the same teaching assistants or teachers
- parents and carers continue to be involved as partners in their children's learning.

Strategies for improvement

Schools where transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 is effective ensure that

- headteachers get involved in the Foundation Stage and promote good early years practice;
- governors are interested and involved in Foundation Stage practice.

This won't happen without headteacher's commitment, a whole-school approach and a variety of strategies for improvement which include:

- Key Stage 1 educators/curriculum co-ordinators visiting Reception classes, Foundation Stage units and nursery classes;
- drawing up and executing an action plan to improve transitions in school;
- introducing parents to the principles and practice of transition;

- extending governors' understanding of the importance of achieving smooth transition and how this can come about;
- continuing professional development of new and existing staff and students.

The impact of good practice in Year 1

In schools that have successful transformation strategies, children in Year 1 say:

"I wanted to bring my rabbit [Buttercup] in today, so I did. Some children drew pastel pictures of her, really good ones because they looked at her and spent ages. Simon did a stitch picture and tried to make it all fluffy but with hard claws, just like Buttercup. We had to find the right stuff to do it. I felt very proud of my rabbit."

"The classes all changed but we got to say who we wanted to be with. I wanted to be with Simon, Kiran and Chandra and I am with them."

"We still see Mrs. Hektor. She comes in and helps us and we know her and that's what she said would happen. It's good because she knows us and she tells Miss Glebe what we like, but we can tell her too."

"I was sad one day and my mum stayed until nearly dinner time and then I felt better."

Diane Rich runs Rich Learning Opportunities: keeping creativity, play and first hand experience at the heart of children's learning.

In 2005 she worked as consultant for NAA to produce the QCA training materials *Continuing the Learning Journey* (QCA/05/1590), designed to help schools give children a positive experience of transition as they move into Key Stage 1 and to show how to make the most effective use of information which comes from the Foundation Stage. She draws on this document in this article.

She is co-author of *First hand experience: what matters to children* published by Rich Learning Opportunities and available from www.richlearningopportunities.co.uk.