An exploration into the effectiveness of the transition made between the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage One.

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"My name is Jade and I have two children. I have achieved Early Years Teacher Status and a first class degree in Early Childhood Studies."

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Aims and Objectives
The aim of this small scale research study is to explore aspects that influence the success of the transition made from the Early Years Foundation Stage (FS) to Key Stage One (KSO); in order to ascertain how effective it is for children. Furthermore, the study intends to research how children feel about this transition that they have to make; to understand if practitioners and policy have it right for them. In order to achieve the aim of the study, the following objectives were focused upon throughout:

1. What elements of practice inform a good transition for children, their families and practitioners?
2. In what way does the learning environment support the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage One?
3. What strategies do teachers use to support a successful transition?
4. How do practitioners work with parents to help promote smooth transitions and what role do relationships have in helping young children cope with change?
5. How do children feel about this transitional phase and what do they like/dislike about the transition they have made?

1.2 The Rationale
Transition is a complex characteristic of human life (Brooker, 2008). Children are required to adapt to new situations and environments throughout their childhood and have to learn to adapt to these many changes that surround them. It is how these transitions are managed that is seen as critical in determining the development of children and their future progress. Interest in this area of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) was initially inspired through an assignment on transition, given during a second year module of the Early Childhood
Studies Degree. During employment as a Teaching Assistant in the Early Years Foundation Stage (FS) during the time that the setting were beginning to prepare for the transition into Key Stage One (KSO); it was observed that some children were struggling with the thought of leaving their teacher, Key Person and the environment they had been in since starting school. Whilst it was witnessed that many of the children appeared content and unfazed by the situation around them; many were anxious, worried, upset and confused.

A desired deeper understanding of how and why some children struggle with this change fuelled the desire to explore this topic. A deepened understanding was wanted in terms of what transition means to; children, their families, and practice as well as a better understanding of how practitioners work with families before, during and after the transition.

1.3 ECEC Context

This transitional period is frequently described as a growing concern between the Government and Early Years Practitioners (O’Connor, 2013). Whilst any transitional change is daunting for young children the way in which this particular transition is handled, by parents, practitioners, settings and Government, is vital in determining how children manage with further educational transitions through childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Steen, 2011). Steen (2011) further states that if these transitional periods are carefully thought of by practitioners, to ensure successful transitions are made, children are better able to adapt to the new environment, actively engage in learning and their ability to cope with future change is enhanced.

It is vital, and legislated, that children are given the opportunities to express themselves regarding issues that concern them. Article 12 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) declare that:
State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters which affects them.


Contextualising this in terms of transition, children should have the right to express their feelings, ideas, and preferences and be listened to by the adults around them.

1.4 The Chapters

A comprehensive review of the literature, in relation to this topic, is presented in Chapter Two. In addition Chapter Three the methodology offers an in depth account of the qualitative data collection process including methods used, the approaches taken, the paradigm that relates to this particular study and detailed ethical considerations that underpin this study. The findings of this study are analysed in Chapter Four which precedes the deliberation of these findings, with the support of the literature, in Chapter Five, the discussion. The study concludes with Chapter Six, the conclusion; concluding the study, providing a reflection on the research process, and where appropriate, recommendations to the setting and policy makers.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction
This chapter reviews literature related to characteristics associated with educational transition; specifically that of the transition made from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to Key Stage One (KSO). This review looks at literature in terms of; well-known childhood theorists, the Key Person Approach, working with parents/families and the educational barriers to smooth transitions. Educational transitions have been globally investigated by academics for well over two decades; consequently generating numerous reports on the long term impacts that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ transitions can have on children (Cartmell, 2011). Steen (2011) maintains the stance that the academic and social-emotional progress of children can be hindered if they do not transition successfully. He further retains the belief that those children who do transition effectively; are better able to adapt to the new environment, actively engage in learning and the ability to cope with future change is enhanced. The unique combination of nature, nurture and events shape a children’s capacity to cope with change; combined with the experiences they have already had in their life.

2.2 Definition
Transition is a multifaceted characteristic of human life and as such has many definitions worldwide. Young Minds (2013) define transitions as ‘the movements, passages or changes from one position, state, stage, subject or concept to another’. In addition Young Minds acknowledge that these changes may be sudden or gradual and can last for differing periods of time (2013). A simplistic definition is that of Cousins (2007) who states transition is a time of change. Dunlop and Fabian (2007) develop this definition further in acknowledging that transitions are likely to involve a change of culture and status. They expand this further believing that transition ‘means leaving the comfort zone and encountering the unknown – new cultures, place, people,'
roles, rules and identity’ (2007: p7). The belief of social factors being put forward here is not dissimilar with that of Fthenakis (1998) who considers that transition is influenced by external factors, such as social change, and claims it to be a period of intensified and developmental demands.

2.3 Theory

This section of the chapter reviews literature relating to various child development theorists. The healthy, holistic, development of children is key in helping to ensure transitions are successful for children. This section reviews John Bowlby’s attachment theory (1973), Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (2000) and Abraham Maslow’s theory of hierarchical needs (1972) which suggests if a child’s needs are met they can become autonomous learners.

2.31 John Bowlby (1907-1990)

John Bowlby’s theory developed from his understanding of the concept of parenting; after he began to explore how the early experiences of children might have an impact on the overall well-being of the adult they will eventually become (O’Connor, 2013; Johnston & Nahmad-Williams, 2009). Bowlby claimed attachments can be both secure and/or insecure (Berk, 2009; Read, 2010). He stressed the significance of children developing safe, secure relationships in early childhood to support them in developing into stable, well-adjusted adults (Johnston & Nahmed-Williams, 2009). Bowlby’s work allowed him to draw the conclusion that a person who has experienced secure attachments is likely to approach the world with confidence and likely to tackle potentially alarming situations, when faced with them, effectively. If they are unable to do so they will seek help (Bowlby, 1973: p208). Recent technological advances in neuroscience have revealed a link to this early inter-relational experience with the development of the brain (O’Connor, 2013; Schore, 2000; Gerhardt, 2004). ‘The richer the experience of interaction, the more the neural connections grow and the brain becomes more richly networked’ (Geddes, 2006).
2.32 Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005)

Bronfenbrenner's work continually adapted with time, and research evidence. In 2005 he characterized his perspective as being a bi-ecological model recognizing through his work, and that of other academics, that children’s biologically influenced dispositions work in conjunction with environmental forces to shape their development (Berk, 2009). Up until this point Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory had viewed children as developing within a complex social system and states children are affected by the relationships and surrounding environments (Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000). He determined that four parts made up the ecological system. The microsystem; the innermost level of the environment consisting of interaction patterns in the child’s immediate surroundings. Crockenberg & Leaerkes (2003) suggest that reciprocal interactions which occur consistently over time have an enduring impact on development. The mesosystem encompasses the connections between microsystems such as the home or school, amongst others. As an example, Gershoff & Aber (2006) write that a child’s academic progress is not solely determined by what takes place in school but also by the parental involvement in school life and the extent to which learning is carried over into the home. The exosystem consists of social settings, parent’s workplace, community services and friends etc, and that may or may not include the child but nonetheless has an influence on development. Research conducted by Werkele & Wolfe (2003) suggested the negative impacts that a breakdown in the exosystems can create. They put forward evidence of families who are socially isolated or affected by unemployment show increased rates of conflict and child abuse. The outermost level of Bronfenbrenner’s model is the macrosystem which is made up of customs, values, laws and resources; among others.

2.33 Abraham Maslow (1908-1970)

Maslow’s early career led him to consider the social, physiological and emotional needs of humans. He identified a hierarchy of basic needs that link the three areas (Maslow, 1972; Johnston & Nahmad-Williams,
2009). He identified five tiers in his model; first and foremost, the need to have physiological needs met. When these have been fulfilled, children are able to concern themselves with safety needs. Following fulfilment of their safety needs, they seek emotional fulfilment. The fourth tier is that of their esteem needs. If each preceding level has been met then Maslow claims children receive self-actualisation; to become everything that they are able to become. If this is achieved, children have the personal skills that relate to managing transitions; self-confidence, self-esteem, an understanding of their environment and in turn what is expected of them. Johnston & Nahmad-Williams (2009) suggest this theory elaborates the concept that children cannot fully develop unless their fundamental needs of safety, affection and physiological needs are fulfilled. Likewise, families cannot function to their full potential or be harmonious; unless they fulfil these needs of children.

2.4 Key Person Approach

The Key Person approach (KPA) is the implementation of a strategy used to enable and sustain good relationships between individual children and individual practitioners, as well as those between practitioners and families. O’Connor (2013) describes it to be ‘an involvement, an individual and reciprocal commitment between staff and a family’. Establishing relationships with children, as a Key Person (KP), helps ensure that relevant child development theories, found in legislation and policy, are being used to support the holistic development of children. Although the KPA is a strategy known to have been in the early years sector for many years, Read (2010) asserts it has not always been put into practice by settings. The guidance issued with the Children Act in 1989 elaborated the significance of children having consistent attention from a practitioner, who knew them well, recognising the importance this had on the well-being of children (Department of Health, 1991). Succeeding this, the value of children having their own KP was recognised in the Birth to Three Matters (BTM) and was a guiding principal during the establishment of this critical piece of legislation (Department for Education and Skills, 2002).
However the KPA was not established in practice until the introduction of the EYFS in 2008, when the role of KP’s was made mandatory in all settings delivering the EYFS framework (Department for Education and Skills, 2007), a ‘non-negotiable requirement’ (Lindon, 2010: p5).

Despite the quantity of research conducted on this approach, and the volume of those who advocate its use, there are still individuals who highlight issues against the use of the KPA. Elfer et al. (2012) review the arguments against the KPA and states that it undermines opportunities for children to have relationships with all members of the early years setting. They further elaborate that the KPA can be threatening to parents in the sense of the developing special relationships with their children. Whilst these are sound arguments made, O’Connor counteracts them with the argument that although they reflect real issues and genuine emotions that can be triggered by this approach, it does not justify the consequences for children left with impersonalised care (2013). Further adding that an understanding of attachment theory, early brain structure and child development enable the challenges to be overcome (2013: p93).

**2.5 Working with parents and families**

A strong positive relationship between parents, teachers and additional professional caregivers is essential for children to develop successfully and reach their full potential (Hobart & Frankel, 2009). Elfer et al. (2012) state close relationships are built through reciprocal conversations. O’Connor (2013) emphasises that strong relationships with parents are critical, further highlighting that practice that supports and sustains reciprocal relationships between parents and practitioners impact children’s well-being and achievement in a positive way. O’Conner suggests that it is essential that children in transition see that the ‘relationship between home and setting is strong and supportive’ (2013, p107). This is consistent with strengthening continuity between the setting and home, ‘microsystems’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Fabian highlights children and families need time to become acquainted with practitioners, routines and the setting; to develop a sense of security as well as enable opportunities for
practitioners to begin building good relationships with each child (2002, p40).

2.6 The educational barriers that can hinder smooth transitions

This section of the literature review outlines the differences between the EYFS and the primary curriculum that exist in KSO. It looks at how various policies and initiatives have impacted on children’s real live experiences and highlights, through research reports, issues that obstruct the educational transition from the EYFS and KSO.

2.61 Disparity between the EYFS and KSO

Despite Government and Local Authorities attempts, there remains a vast disparity between the educational experiences of children in the EYFS and those in KSO; particularly the lack of continuity in the pedagogy that underpins the two phases of education (Fisher, 2011). She further emphasises that a key difference in the pedagogy, which has led to concerns on both a national and local level, is that whilst play and child initiated learning are promoted in the early years the focus shifts to adult-led learning in primary education (Fisher, 2011; p1). The discrepancy between the two educational experiences is further emphasised with the Independent Cambridge Primary Review (2010) and the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum (2009) both stressing the requirement to re-think the educational experiences of children between the ages of five to seven. This recommendation is not dissimilar to that made by the Office of Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) (2004) in their report produced in regards to the transition made from the EYFS to Year One. The findings suggested that there was an insufficient consideration between the two curricula’s.

2.62 Policy and initiatives

Fisher (2010) questions policy and initiatives that call for children who are five in the EYFS and those who are five in KSO, to be working so differently from each other; claiming the reality is that it is the conflicting beliefs of successive government initiatives that have driven
the wedge between EYFS and KSO practice. A new phase of education was introduced in 2000 called the Foundation Stage, renamed the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008 when a single framework applied to children from birth to five years. This was accompanied by the first national guidance for practitioners teaching children aged three to five. Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (Department for Education and Skills, 2000) set out key guidelines in which young children should learn and established teachers were to facilitate and support learning, in a play-based curriculum, and emphasised that the focus should be more on child-initiated learning rather than adult-led. As teachers in the Foundation Stage were adopting a more child-centred approach to teaching, staff in the primary curriculum were still adjusting to the first national guidance that incorporated how children were taught from KSO onwards. The National Literacy Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) and The National Numeracy Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, 1999) delivered the model in which teachers were expected to teach these two core subjects; both entirely dependent on teacher initiated learning (Fisher, 2010).

2.63 Reports concerning the transition from the EYFS to KSO

In addition to aforementioned findings, Ofsted (2004) found that the transition from the EYFS into KSO was sometimes abrupt. Inspectors recommended that ‘learning experiences in Year One should build upon the practical approaches and structured play in Year R’ (Ofsted, 2004; p 3). Sanders et al. (2005) identified that the move to a more structured curriculum, from that of a play-based one, is the biggest challenge of this transition.

2.7 Conclusion

A significant link has emerged, from the literature, which clearly portrays the need for children to be resilient if the transition from the EYFS to KSO is to be successful. The literature further indicates that resilience is grown, inadvertently, through the development of secure attachments. The theories identified in this literature review all offer
coherent and plausible explanations as to how children develop. How they develop personal skills such as self-confidence, self-esteem, an understanding of their environments, what is expected of them within these environments, and the ability to make relationships/friends. All these attributes enable young children to become problem solvers and decision makers; these combined with their personal skills, enable young children to manage transitions and offer them the coping mechanisms that can make the transitional phase smoother.

This review has also highlighted the importance of working with parents/families, not only during times of educational transition but also in a wider context; in order to help parents/families enhance the holistic development of their children. Whilst the literature states that the Key Person Approach is mandatory, it can be argued that this approach will not always work for everyone upon the first encounter. It does suggest that the barriers to this approach are overcome by the commitment of the Key Person and the setting, through the well-developed relationships of partnership. Lastly, whilst it is evident that research is abundant in terms the area of this educational transition; it is apparent there is something missing.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The qualitative approach to research suggests, that the social world is constructed by our shared cultural understandings of situations (Punch, 2009). Robert-Holmes (2011) elaborated on this adding, ‘we continually create and construct our social world by negotiating with others the meanings of our actions’ (p70). The methods used to gather data for this small scale research study consisted of; semi structured interviews with teachers, unstructured questionnaires for parents, subsequently leading to an unstructured joint interview with parents, and children’s perceptions were gained through informal group time. This combination of methods ensured the focus remained on collecting a breadth of qualitative data and the triangulation of that data. A qualitative approach is concerned with understanding individuals’ perceptions of the world (Bell, 2010). The combination of methods used allowed all participants to share their thoughts and feelings which was vital in ensuring that the data collected reflected the data needed to answer the main research question; an exploration into the effectiveness of the transition made between the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage One.

3.2 Context of Setting

The research was conducted in a community primary school in Oxfordshire. The school educates two hundred and fifty nine pupils with most pupils being White British. Key Stage One is separated into three mixed year one/two classes with a total of eighty eight pupils in this cohort, forty five of which are year one pupils. In 2013 the school was rated good by Ofsted who state:

A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils’ needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Ofsted, 2013
3.3 Research Paradigm

A paradigm embraces elements of philosophy, values, theory, epistemology and methods. In its simplest form, it is a way of looking at the world (Punch, 2000). The intention of the research design was to use methods which gathered participant’s feelings and opinions on the effectiveness of the transition in topic. Furthermore, it allowed for qualitative data to be collected in order to develop an understanding of participant’s experiences. Therefore, this research aligns itself within the interpretative paradigm which, as suggested by Cresswell (2009), seeks out to advance understanding within a topic and allows researchers to look at the complexity of views gathered as opposed to narrowing meanings into categories and/or ideas. The data collected for this research is in contrast to quantitative data collection, which is seen to be aligned within a positivist paradigm; concerned with gathering only factual information (Greetham, 2009).

3.4 Validity, Reliability and Triangulation

Using the four methods outlined in this chapter allowed for the data to be compared and combined during the data analysis (see chapter 4). This research practice of comparison is known as triangulation. Triangulation refers to the collection of data using multiple methods. Mukherji and Albon (2009) argue that using triangulation gives qualitative data validity. Additionally, Laws et al. (2003) stipulates the ‘key to triangulation is to see the same thing from differing perspectives’ (p281).

As a result of the qualitative approach taken to collect information, reliability in gaining the same results in a mirrored study is impossible due to opinions and experiences of a participant being unique to that person. Instead, Bell suggests that the reliability of the qualitative research can be seen from the ‘piloting of the instrument’ (2010:p119). All methods were sampled using purposive and convenience sampling. As described by O’Leary (2010), convenience sampling is a method with which a chosen sample is based upon what is available to the researcher. O’Leary further refers to purposive
sampling as sample participants being chosen specifically to provide meaningful responses to the research topic.

3.5 Bias

‘Many factors can result in bias and there are always dangers in research carried out by individual researchers…’ (Bell, 2010:p169). Care and consideration was taken throughout the research project, to ensure bias was eliminated as much as possible. Piloting questions prior to use ensured no leading questions were used during interviews and questionnaires.

To further ensure the research was as unbiased as possible, all interviews were transcribed in detail. All questionnaire responses were accurately transcribed into tables to ensure that the responses were made available for data analysis and evidence.

Having a teacher present during group time was important ethically to protect both the children and the researcher. It also ensured that the data collected was not bias. Children’s perspectives were accurately recorded into tables, including those that were illegible, to counteract any preconceptions the researcher may have had to responses from previous literature.

3.6 Pilot Study

‘All data gathering tools should be piloted to test how long it takes recipients to complete them, to check all questions and instructions are clear and enable you to remove any items which do not yield useable data.’

Bell (2010:p151).

The pilot sample consisted of one Year One teacher, ten parents/carers of Year One children and five Year One pupils, not from the setting to be researched but in a similar school in Oxfordshire. Doing a pilot study prior to research commencing, is crucial in determining if the chosen methods will be valid and reliable (Silverman, 2010). No problems were encountered with the pilot study. The questions designed for all methods, generated the desired information. The parent questionnaires yielded a 90% response rate; influencing the
decision to use this method as a technique to gather parents' perceptions.

3.7 Sample

The population invited to participate in the research consisted of; parents and/or carers of year one pupils, three Key Stage One teachers and forty-five year one pupils. In the interest of safety for all involved and for the integrity of the research, all interviews and the perspectives of children were gathered within the naturalistic setting during the winter term of 2014. Consent was obtained from the school through a letter, and formal meeting with the headmistress to discuss ethics, methods and timescale of the research. Questionnaires were first approved by the headmistress and sent home directly from the school and returned to a drop box, at the school, in sealed envelopes. This was done to ensure the anonymity of respondents as well as for the practicality of responses being retained in one place as opposed to three different classrooms.

3.8 Questionnaires

Whilst questionnaires are characteristically considered to be a method for quantitative research; the use of structured and/or semi-structured questionnaires for data collection, open-ended questionnaires can be used to gather qualitative data. Silverman (2010) supports this and suggests all questions being open-ended, allows participants to respond with personal opinions and perceptions to the topic in question.

As a result of time limitations during the research stage, using questionnaires appeared advantageous as opposed to conducting individual interviews or focus groups. Furthermore, the use of these methods would have taken a considerable amount of time to organise, conduct, transcribe, analyse and ‘require a considerable amount of cooperation and enthusiasm from participants’ (Gray, 2009; p389).

Open-ended questionnaires were given to parents/carers as a method of gathering their experiences and opinions on the effectiveness, for
their child, of the transition made into Key Stage One. Due to the number of pupils in the year one cohort, it was thought that using questionnaires would be an effective way of gathering parent’s perceptions across the cohort. However the questionnaires yielded a poor response rate of just 6.67%.

3.9 Joint Interview with Parents

Due to the poor response rate of questionnaires, parents of year one pupils were invited to participate in a group interview. Bell (2010) argues that interviews can yield rich data and ‘can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses’ (p161). Whilst all parents of year one pupils were invited to participate, through conversations prior and after school, only two parents accepted the invitation. Confirmation was sought from both parents, preceding the interview, that they had not previously submitted a questionnaire as part of the research study.

Seven questions were asked during the interview which replicated the open ended questions asked in the questionnaires. This was purposeful in ensuring the same opportunity was afforded to ensure consistency with gathering parent’s perceptions as well as allowing issues to be explored freely (Greetham, 2009).

Gray (2009) advocates joint interviews as a method that facilitates the collection of corroborating or differing perspectives; in addition to the advantage of allowing omitted details of one participant to be filled in by the other. There is a danger, with this method of research, that the participants may divert each other’s attention. A further disadvantage is that one participant may dominate the interview. Care was taken during the process to ensure this did not happen.

3.10 Semi Structured Interviews with Teachers

Semi structured interviews were conducted one to one with all Key Stage One teachers. An interview guide was designed and a list consisting of nine questions was constructed. A semi structured approach was taken to allow the interviewer to ‘seek both clarification
and elaboration on the answers given’ (May, 2011; p134). This advantage is similarly noted by Bell (2010) who notes interviews are advantageous for their adaptability in probing responses and investigating motives and feelings (p161). The use of semi structured interviews was further valued as this method enables the comparison of the variation of information generated in each interview (May, 2011).

Two of the three interviews were conducted in the deputy head’s office after school. This was planned due to the assurance of not being disturbed as well lending itself to be a comfortable environment for participants. Cresswell (2007) discussed the importance of using a quiet location free from distractions as well as ensuring the location lends itself to audio recording (p134). The third interview was conducted in one of the schools nurture rooms. This was due to the timetabling of staff and proved to be as good as the previous location used for interviews; it further used Bell’s notion that the interviewer must make themselves available to ‘fit in’ with participants plans (p170).

3.11 Children’s Perspectives

‘Increasingly, children themselves are being seen as important people within the research process’ (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989) provides a framework for addressing rights relating to children and their right to participate (UN, 1989). Article 12 is significant to research purposes as it declares:

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters which affects them.


This declaration means that:

Children have the right to be consulted and taken into account of, to have access to information, to freedom of speech and opinion and to challenge decisions made on their behalf.

Listening to and acting upon the voices and opinions of children in research was further legislated with the Children Bill (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). Furthermore a commitment to listen and respect the viewpoints and various voices of children was embedded into the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCFS, 2008).

Careful consideration was given in making the decision to involve children in this research study, in regards to the consideration of their participation and their protection; as suggested by Coady (2010:68). Ethical approval to involve children in this research was sought and gained prior to consideration of the method to be used. Whilst interviews, focus groups and questionnaires were all considered, these methods all held the disadvantage of children possibly feeling threatened or intimidated (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). It was decided that data would be collected through informal group time with the children; for whom parental consent and participant consent had been gained.

Seventeen children participated in the group time where a Key Stage One teacher was present during data collection; primarily to ensure children remained happy throughout and to help ensure integrity for the research. Time was spent with the children through voluntary work at the school prior to the research study commencing. Robert-Holmes (2011) suggests that building a relationship with children prior to data collection is ‘critically important to the success’ as children are not used to ‘their opinions and experiences’ being sought by adults unknown to them (p.152).

The children took active roles in the research, taking control of distributing the required resources, which they appeared to enjoy. Each child had post it notes and a pencil and were asked five questions in relation to their experience of the transition made into Key Stage One. They were informed prior to each question that they did not have to answer the question if they did not want to. For those that chose to participate, answers were written on a post it note and the children posted it into a corresponding box. The approach taken was effective in relation to data collection and verbal communication between the
Key Stage One teacher and all children confirmed they were all happy after the group time had ended.

### 3.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations remained at the forefront for the duration of the research process. The ethical guidelines, as outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) and those of the University of Northampton, were integrated into all aspects of ethical procedures. These guidelines, combined with detailed information of the intended research, were used to compose individual ethical statements for participants to consider prior to deciding upon participation.

**Anonymity**

Participants were fully informed of the research purpose and further informed of the intended data collection methods. All participants were assured of anonymity which was adhered to due to no names, details or names of children being asked for. For the participants of interviews, and child participants in group time, the consent form only asked for initials of willing participants.

Participants were made aware that responses would be published within a dissertation and as such would be seen by university lecturers as well as other readers of the research. They were further made aware, however, that anyone who should access the research would not be able to identify anyone who participated in the research or the school it was conducted in.

**Confidentiality**

To ensure confidentiality of responses, participants were informed of how information was to be recorded and stored. Furthermore, the length of time it would be stored for. The statement clearly defined participant’s rights to access any research conducted with themselves with the exception of the questionnaires, due to the anonymity of them.
Informed Consent

Participation in the research was clearly highlighted to be voluntary. All those invited to partake were assured that they would face no disadvantage with the researcher or the setting should they choose not to participate. Additionally it was made clear that no reward or incentive was offered for those that chose to participate.

BERA (2011) highlights that informed consent is a vital aspect of ensuring a research project is ethically sound. Individual consent forms were produced for the four methods used. The consent forms were accompanied by a covering letter as well as an ethical statement. Voluntary informed consent was required of participants prior to any research being conducted. In the case of children, parents were required to consent primarily; this was followed by gaining consent of the children. To ensure all children who participated in the group time were still willing to share their experiences, verbal consent was sought after a conversation between the researcher, the Key Stage One teacher and the children.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the chosen methods, and the methodology, that were used to gather information for this qualitative research study. These triangulated methods allowed for responses to be coded, analysed and presented in the following chapter.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction
This chapter introduces a summary of the data collected using the methods discussed in the previous chapter; individual interviews with teachers, questionnaires and a joint interview with parents as well as group time shared with children to gather their perspectives. Through the analysis of all interview transcripts several themes were identified. Subsequently, the analysis of the questionnaires and responses of children further highlighted the same themes of data relating to; play, literacy/numeracy, relationships, working with families, strategies/practice, the environment and feelings, skills and abilities.

The themes identified demonstrate links to the literature review and the research questions; which have been used as headings for this chapter. The various perspectives gained through data collection have been summarised and displayed under each heading.

4.2 What elements of practice inform a good transition for children, their families and practitioners?
During the individual interviews, teachers were asked how long they had been teaching for and about the experience they have had in working with children in the Foundation Stage (FS) and Key Stage One (KSO). Responses revealed teacher A has been teaching for sixteen years, and has ‘always worked in KS O and FS…’. Teacher B has been teaching for four years, two months in this setting, and has not yet taught in FS; ‘...my experience of KS One was purely placement based…’. Teacher C said ‘...I’ve been teaching for a year and a half…I was teaching in foundation and this year I am working with a year one/two class’.

When asked how this experience had influenced their pedagogy for working with young children, all three teachers referred to the importance of having practical hands on experiences for children to
learn. Teacher A stated, ‘I think this hands on learning is so beneficial as you naturally then bring that learning through play into KSO...I think there is a real danger that...the good practice that happens in early years...gets diluted down and there is less hands on activities for the children to take part in and it’s a lot more text book style teaching...’.

Teachers A and C both stated that their pedagogy was ‘definitely’ play based.

Teachers were asked if the school had a specific policy for the transition from FS to KSO, all three responses verified that there was not. Teacher C commented, ‘No. We do not have one that is specifically written...we probably should...’ whilst teacher A suggested, ‘...I think the main reason behind that though is that we make sure the foundation stage class are very much a part of the whole school’. The same two teachers spoke about transition days prior to children moving into year one.

They both further spoke about the importance of keeping parents informed, teacher A ‘...we do a lot in regards to talking to our parents...’. This comment was supported by parents as Parent R-2 wrote ‘The school do seem to be supportive and this obviously helps. I feel that there is very good communication between the school and parents in general’.

Further responses from parent questionnaires and the joint interview with parents; verified teacher A’s comment.
Table 1. Parent responses to the question: How well informed were you of the transition process before, during and after your child’s move into year one?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent-R1</td>
<td>Very well informed.</td>
<td>Parent Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-R2</td>
<td>I felt as though I was given enough information and kept informed. I don’t think we were given lots of information but we certainly did feel that we got the information we needed.</td>
<td>Parent Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-R3</td>
<td>Very well informed, mainly through daily chat with teacher at classroom door and emails, newsletter etc.</td>
<td>Parent Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI-A</td>
<td>‘…we also had a meeting with the foundation teachers...was always very approachable for me to talk with... I feel that more could have been done in September...we didn’t really hear much after they went in to year one’</td>
<td>Joint Interview with Parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI-B</td>
<td>‘I feel I was very well informed actually. We received letters...detailed... break downs from the teachers directly...’</td>
<td>Joint Interview with Parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 presents parent’s responses to the settings information sharing.

4.3 In what way does the learning environment support the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage One?

During the teacher interviews, all three teachers commented in some way of how their maths and literacy programmes are used as a continuum from FS into KSO. Teacher A noted ‘... because we continue with the Read, Write Inc program for phonics and the Maths Makes Sense from Foundation into KS1, I think that’s a natural continuum so it’s not so much of a culture shock....It’s something familiar for the children’. Teacher B commented ‘Especially with Maths Makes Sense, now when they come up, every class has a Maths Makes Sense area, every class has a reading area, everyone’s got a literacy working wall’. Teacher C had a similar comment to teacher B and added that they are
‘...in a way the children can connect with it’. Speaking of the work done in creating the working walls, Teacher C stated ‘...This is great for the children...its great continuity for them and effective in the sense they can use these boards/walls in their own classes if they need to’.

It was clear through data analysis that the environment for KSO has changed considerably since January 2014. Two of the three KSO teachers were appointed in the January term. It was acknowledged by all three teachers that the environment provided previously had differed considerably.

**Table 2. Teacher’s responses when asked how they plan for an effective learning environment.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>‘...we have had a big change in KS1 since Christmas...we were really keen to develop...the different areas of learning and play in each classroom. So we've put in role play...we've got the sand play’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>‘Things like free flow play, before January I think there was limited free flow for them. Now, we have dedicated free flow time every afternoon... I think it’s a good, effective learning environment for them now’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>‘Since Christmas, play has been a focal point in helping the children progress’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 demonstrates the acknowledgment of teachers that learning through play is now a key focus for an effective learning environment.

In terms of play now being incorporated into KSO, teacher C stated ‘The children are learning through real experiences in an environment that supports that and helps further their understanding and learning...We have seen their academic skills rising faster now than they were before Christmas when play was ‘if we had time’. It is clear the children enjoy their learning environment, are able to decide what is in their learning environment and in effect this is effective for them’. The idea of children having choices in their learning environment was also mentioned by Teacher A, ‘...the children have a lot more input into the environment they would like to have in KS1’.
Whilst responses from parent questionnaires found no mention of the new KSO stance on play, the joint interview with parents referenced play and it was acknowledged by JI-A that the increased level of play has been made recently; ‘...I know they involve a lot of play now but the amount of play they have now is quite new I think...they do a lot of learning through play...which is obviously similar to what she was doing before...’.

4.4 What strategies do teachers use to support a successful transition?

The setting uses a buddying system as a strategy to help prepare FS children for KSO. The strategy is implemented to help FS children build relationships in preparation for transition. Speaking of the strategy, teacher A said ‘I think it’s fantastic...it’s really nice for the KS Two children to have a real specific role in supporting the FS children. The FS love it because they have their, their older person come down and help them. I think that’s…it’s got rid of a lot of barriers that...happen between KS1...and Foundation...I think there is definitely a place for KS1 as well to...closer work with the FS children...’.

Whilst the teachers acknowledged that there was no specific policy for transition they did elaborate on the approaches they use as a setting.

**Table 3. Teacher’s responses to the settings approaches on the transition from FS to KSO.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>‘...a lot of schools...I think there is a lot more of a challenge in making sure that...transition into year one is smooth. I think ours is naturally quite smooth because of the geography of the building...foundation stage is right in the middle of KS1...We are physically in each other’s areas, they mix at playtimes...at lunchtimes and I think that really helps the FS to sort of grow up very quickly and then moving straight into year one’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>‘...so we done a lot of work starting...on everyone having similar layouts...so they know wherever they are in KS One now, the classrooms have the same resources in the same places which echo’s the FS as much as possible...’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>‘...we do...have a programme to make sure transition is really thought about...to make sure children know what the expectations are for next year. They...can go and meet their new teacher, probably I think we did that</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
three times last year...they meet their new classes, they get the opportunity to do some work with their new teacher so it works really well...It works really well for all children, to have that hands on experience of what it is going to be like'

Table 2 displays responses received from teachers when asked if the setting had a transition policy.

When parents were asked how helpful the strategies had been in supporting a successful transition for their child, all five responses were positive. In the joint interview with parents, JI-B said ‘so in our experience...I think the strategies they use...work’ and JI-A stated ‘...the settling in days in their new class is good...they get a taste of what it’s going to be like...in September’. Responses from the parent questionnaire revealed parents were aware of the approaches adopted by the setting and found they worked. Parent R-3 wrote ‘Very helpful – being informed ahead of time is the key’.

4.5 **How do practitioners work with parents to help promote smooth transitions and what role do relationships have in helping young children cope with change?**

Through data analysis it is clear the setting does a great deal in terms of working with parents. All parents referenced at least once, of the communication between the setting and the home and parents feeling welcome; JI-A commented ‘...they are...very welcoming...’ and JI-B stated ‘I think from the beginning, *his teacher* has answered any questions I have had, has always been welcoming’. During interviews all teachers acknowledged that good communication helps build positive relationships.
Table 4. Summarized teacher responses when asked about how they work with parents during this transitional phase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>‘Just making sure communication is there, so we put weekly notices up in the class windows to say what learning has happened in the week, just as prompts for parents…’ ‘…I think there’s a real big value in keeping those communication links open’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>‘…so…that going out after school, just being there and just trying to have those chit chats when parents want to talk about things…’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>‘…we met with parents to talk about the big change from foundation to year one’ ‘…we have an open door policy…for everyone to come in…if they want to come and have a chat about anything they can’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 highlights some of the ways in which teachers work with parents during the transitional period and beyond.

Table 5. Teachers were asked if they felt the Key Person Approach should be extended into year one for continued emotional support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>‘…personally I have mixed opinions about the Key Person Approach because I feel as a class teacher I want to know all thirty of my children inside out and I also want my TA to do that…children as well, have got that trust in all of us and they see myself and the TA as the same…’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>‘…we try and ensure that all the children are comfortable and confident with all the adults within KS One…’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>‘The reason why we didn’t do it is because we have a nurture intervention scheme for children who aren’t quite ready…They might need a bit of time to talk about how they are feeling and what’s worrying them; and they have that with their nurture time,’</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 displays teachers responses in terms of why the Key Person approach is not continued into year one.
It was noted that half an hour is timetabled in the mornings for PSED with teachers and peers. Teacher B said ‘As they continue to transition up through the school, the skills being embedded during the morning sessions, will help them cope with these transitions better’.

The importance of relationships reoccurred throughout the data analysis. There is a large cohort of year one pupils which subsequently led the school to having mixed KSO year groups. The parent questionnaires and joint interview with parents revealed that some children were anxious of being separated from their friends and joining older children. Parent R1 wrote ‘Some of her friends had gone into different classes so she was a little anxious of going into the year one class with the mixed year 2’s...’.

Whilst this anxieties were genuine, data further revealed that the children settled well into the mixed year groups and appear to be happy. Parent R3 wrote ‘Now he feels happy...and has no concerns about the older children...’.

When asked of the skills children needed to make an effective transition, teacher A spoke of the importance of the children feeling happy saying ‘...children being confident, comfortable and feeling safe...helps happiness, and happy children will learn. If they are not happy, you’ve got to do that first. It doesn’t matter what you feel you’ve got to teach...they have to be happy first...you have to get that right from day one...that’s as much us getting to know the children as the children getting to know us...So it’s...making sure they feel safe and feel happy...’.

4.6 How do children feel about this transitional phase and what do they like/dislike about the transition they have made?

Children’s perceptions revealed four of the themes that were found whilst analysing the data collected from practitioners and parents. It further disclosed the feelings the children had before and after the transition.
Table 6. What did you like most about Foundation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy/Numeracy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegible answers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children that chose not to answer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows that amongst the children who offered a response, half of them liked the play in Foundation.

One child responded positively about numeracy in foundation with ‘I liket maths’. Two children made reference to outside play; one writing ‘I mist (miss) wen we playd in the ship’ and another wrote ‘I luvd playin wiv the bighks (bikes)’.

Table 7. What do you like most about year one?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy/Numeracy</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play/Term Topic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegible answers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children that chose not to answer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 illustrates that the majority of children asked said they like literacy or numeracy.

Six of the seven children displayed a preference for handwriting with one of those writing ‘I lyk abawt I do handwritin’. Other responses included liking the term topic; ‘Having the topic about Aladdin’ and ‘I like the cave of wonders’. Only three responses were play based.

When children were asked how they felt about moving into year one, two children chose not to answer and one response was illegible. Of the fourteen legible answers; ten children responded with positive
emotions such as ‘I feeleed happee’. Four responded negatively with one child writing ‘Ufrayd!’.

When asked how they felt now, in year one, nine children responded positively with one response being ‘I feel awesome’; two children expressed feelings of sadness and, whilst two expressed they miss Foundation, one wrote ‘I miss foudaton but I am happy now’. Two children chose not to respond to this question and two responses were illegible.

**Table 8. Parent’s responses when asked how their child felt in Foundation and how they felt now.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent-R1</td>
<td>She enjoys school and loves learning. Her confidence has grown this year and she’s very happy to be there.</td>
<td>Parent Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-R2</td>
<td>He felt happy in school in foundation, a little worried at times about the older children but that’s probably to be expected, being the youngest in the group in what probably felt like a very big school. Now he feels happy…</td>
<td>Parent Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-R3</td>
<td>Much the same, nervous at first but he soon settled in.</td>
<td>Parent Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI-A</td>
<td>‘Asking my daughter how she felt about foundation, she said “good, because I really liked (name omitted)”...her first teacher in year one was “bad because she was bossy and kept telling me to shush if I was upset or crying”...she is really happy with the new teacher and she says it’s just like... foundation. I am just so glad that she is my happy little (name omitted) again!’</td>
<td>Joint Interview with Parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI-B</td>
<td>‘As far as I can tell it’s the same really. I mean he used to love going into foundation...and as far as I can tell he is still enjoying it just as much now in year one...as far as I am aware, from what the teachers have fed back to me... He seems to be getting on just as well in year one as he did in foundation’</td>
<td>Joint Interview with Parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most varied responses came when children were asked if they could change something about year one, what would it be? Two children suggested they missed friends with one writing, ‘Play mor wif my ovr (other) frinds’. One child wrote ‘Mor lots of maths’ whilst two children referred to doing no maths. One child responded with ‘nufing’
whilst another wrote 'I want to chansh the hol school'. Four children chose not to answer, one response was illegible and the remainder of responses was varied.

The data findings have been presented and key themes shown. The following chapter discusses these findings and those found in the literature review in Chapter Two.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction
This penultimate chapter discusses the findings previously presented in Chapter four, where the data was analysed to identify the overarching themes amongst all four methods of data collection. The identified themes were then linked to the research questions which were used as indicators to present the findings. For continuity, this chapter further utilises the research questions to structure the discussion. The exploration of data pertaining to these questions is discussed and further supported by relevant literature; presented in Chapter Two.

5.2 Aims and Objectives
This small scale research study was initiated to explore the effectiveness of the transition made from the Foundation Stage (FS) to Key Stage One (KSO); in terms of children and their learning. The perspectives of those involved in the transition were needed, to develop a deepened understanding of how effective this transition is for children. Therefore qualitative methodology was used to collect the data. The perspectives of three KSO teachers, five parents and seventeen children were gathered; through individual semi-structured interviews, a joint parent interview, questionnaires for parents and through the use of unstructured group time with children. Each method was transcribed and coded to identify similarities or differences amongst participant’s perspectives; using multiple methods and perspectives provided triangulation of the data.

5.3 What elements of practice inform a good transition for children, their families and practitioners?

The literature review revealed that there remains a vast disparity in the educational experiences of children in the FS and those of children in KSO; principally in the lack of continuity in the pedagogy that supports the two phases of education. Fisher (2011) emphasised that a
key difference in pedagogy is that whilst child initiated learning is promoted in early year’s education, the focus shifts abruptly to adult led learning in primary education. This perception is not dissimilar to the belief of teacher A who commented ‘...the good practice that happens in early years...gets diluted down and there is less hands on activities for the children to take part in and it’s a lot more text book style teaching...’.

Responses during teacher interviews revealed that teacher’s A and C both have a pedagogy that is ‘definitely’ play based. However teacher B, made no indication of having a play based pedagogy. Evidence gathered during interviews could suggest that having experience working with this age group could influence the pedagogy of practitioners. This notion can be supported with the responses of teachers when asked of their experience with this age range. Whilst teachers A and C have worked with this age range for the majority of their career, B disclosed that no experience of the FS had been had and experience with KSO ‘...was purely placement based...’.

Previous research conducted by the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) (2004), the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum (IRPC) (2009) and the Independent Cambridge Review (ICR) (2010) all represented concern to the vast difference between the two curricula’s. The IRPC and ICR further made the recommendation that educational experiences of children aged five to seven needed to be rethought. The data gathered appears to reflect these recommendations through the practice and experience of the KSO teachers. Teacher A spoke of the hands on learning experience in the FS as ‘...beneficial as you naturally then bring that learning through play into KSO...’.

The research undertaken with parents revealed that they are happy with the practice of the setting in terms of making the transitional experience smooth for themselves and their families; Table 1 in Chapter 4 presented these responses. Whilst all responses indicated that parents are happy overall with the information they receive from
the setting, one parent felt that more could have been done after the children had made the transition.

5.4 In what way does the learning environment support the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage One?

The literature identified that the move from the play based curriculum of the FS, to that of a more structured one in KSO, to be the most challenging aspect of this transition (Sanders et al., 2005). The research conducted indicates this setting to have the right balance of; play based learning alongside the national guidance of teacher initiated learning; including that of the two core subjects of numeracy and literacy. The previous chapter presented evidence of how the settings numeracy and literacy programmes are used as a continuum from the FS into KSO. It was emphasised that the setting use the same programmes for children in the FS which in turn helps prepare them for the work they will do in KSO. Teacher A commented ‘...that’s a natural continuum so it’s not so much of a culture shock....It’s something familiar for the children’.

The data gathered clearly evidenced there had been a considerable change in the environment of KSO, and the pedagogy of the team, since January. Table 2 clearly portrayed that learning through play is a key focus for the setting to deliver an effective learning environment. Teacher C commented ‘...It is clear the children enjoy their learning environment, are able to decide what is in their learning environment and in effect this is effective for them’. Teacher C further acknowledged that the children in KSO are now learning through ‘...real experiences in an environment that supports that and helps further their understanding and learning...’ . It was further noted that the academic skills of the children have been seen to be progressing faster through having the two curriculums working alongside each other.

The parents that took part in the joint interview referenced play and acknowledged it as a continuum from FS. They further recognised this has been a recent development in KSO. This evidence suggests that
the setting had involved and informed parents of this change; signifying good relationships between the setting and families in regards to children’s learning. This evidence appears to be consistent with Gershoff & Aber’s (2006) notion that a child’s academic progress is not solely determined by what takes place in school but also by the parental involvement in school life.

5.5 What strategies do teachers use to support a successful transition?

Table 3 presented responses of KSO teachers to the settings approaches on the transition from FS to KSO. Whilst the teachers revealed the setting does not have a specific transition policy they use for educational transitions; it was clear through their elaborations to the interview questions that a number of approaches are implemented to aid a smooth transition. Teacher A’s response highlights the strategic move of the setting, in having the FS ‘...right in the middle of KSO...’.

A report produced by Ofsted found that the transition into KSO was sometimes abrupt for FS children. Inspectors recommended that learning experiences in year one, should build upon the practical approaches and structured play children have previously encountered (Ofsted, 2004). Evidence from teacher interviews revealed that the experiences KSO children have appear to be consistent with Ofsted’s recommendation. Not only did they emphasise the importance of using play, as a strategy to help support the transition, but they also stressed the significance of ensuring the environment ‘...echo’s the FS as much as possible...’.

It was evident that the teachers were united in the opinion of ensuring the environment was ready for the children, rather than making the children ready for the environment. This position taken by the KSO teachers supports Bronfenbrenner’s theory that environmental forces work, in conjunction with children’s biologically influenced dispositions, to shape their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Berk, 2009).
Teacher A spoke of a buddying system adopted by the setting to help build relationships in preparation for the transition. This is implemented using Key Stage Two children supporting FS children. The development of safe, secure relationships in early childhood is significant for children if they are to develop into well-adjusted adults (Johnston & Nahmad-Williams, 2009). Speaking of the approach, teacher A said ‘...The FS love it because they have their, their older person come down and help them...it’s got rid of a lot of barriers that...happen between KS1...and Foundation...’ It was noted that teacher A feels there is scope for KSO children to become involved in this support system for FS children.

5.6 How do practitioners work with parents to help promote smooth transitions and what role do relationships have in helping young children cope with change?

Evidence from this small scale research study suggests relations between the setting and families are particularly strong; with participants acknowledging the setting ensures communication and working with parents is seen as a priority. Teachers emphasised the many ways in which they embrace families to feel involved in the education of their children; Table 4 presented main summarized responses of teachers of how this is implemented. All parent responses referenced information sharing, between the setting and home, in a positive manner. Parents echoed feeling welcome at the school and further iterated that teachers were available to answer any questions that may have arisen. This is consistent with Fabian’s (2002) statement that if children are to benefit fully, parents and teachers should have a working knowledge of each other.

Practice that supports sustained reciprocal relationships between practitioners and parents have a positive impact on children’s achievement and well-being (O'Connor, 2013). Data collected revealed the settings open door policy was one of their key methods used to sustain good, open relationships with families and was referred to by teachers and parents alike. Teacher A stated ‘...I think there’s a real big value in keeping those communication links open’.
Adopting the Key Person Approach (KPA) is a ‘non-negotiable requirement’ (Lindon, 2010: p5), a mandatory strategy for all settings delivering the EYFS framework (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Table 5 demonstrated a summary of teachers perspectives on this approach, when they were asked if they thought it should be extended to children in year one for emotional support. Whilst two of the three teachers acknowledged that the KPA could be continued, all three teachers provided arguments as to why it is not continued in their setting. Teacher M stated ‘...I feel as a class teacher I want to know all thirty of my children inside out, and I also want my TA to do that...’ This perspective mirrors arguments made in the literature and is consistent with Elfer et el. (2012) who argue the KPA undermines opportunities for children to have relationships with all members of the setting.

5.7 How do children feel about this transitional phase and what do they like/dislike about the transition they have made?

Responses from all methods of data collection made reference to the feelings of anxiety that can or did occur during the transitional period. Fabian (2002) believes that meetings and visits prior to transition can help dispel some of these anxieties that children and families may feel. The research conducted with children in the setting revealed some children’s perspectives before and after the transition period into year one. The feelings children had prior and post transition were also revealed.

O’Connor believes that children have an immense capacity for thinking philosophically as well as about their immediate experiences (2013; p 103). Table 6 presented the responses of what the children liked about Foundation. Eight responses made reference to liking the play in FS with two responses specifically linked to outdoor play; one child wrote ‘I mist (miss) wen we playd in the ship’. Whilst the research shows KSO now do more learning through play, Table 7 revealed only 3 children responded to most liking play in year one; two children did reference play in relation to the term topic. It could be suggested, based on the data presented, that whilst a conscious effort is being
made for children learning through play, literacy and numeracy in some classes may take more of a lead; as seven children expressed literacy and numeracy as being their most liked aspect of year one.

Similarly, when children were asked how they felt about moving into year one and how did they feel now; conflicting feelings were recorded. Ten children responded with positive emotions of moving into year one yet only seven responded with positive emotions of being in year one now. One child recognised both a negative and positive feeling and wrote ‘I miss foundation but I am happy now’. Parent’s perceptions further recorded the differing emotions felt by their children prior to moving into KSO, though all parents stated that their child was happy now; as presented in Table 8.

Margetts (2002), considered having friends in the same class can help compensate for other factors that can make children vulnerable during transition. When asked what would children change in year one if they could, responses were varied. The children mentioned having more play as well as wanting to play with ‘other’ friends. Responses from parents noted that some children were anxious of their friends not being there in year one; due to the cohort being split into three classes.

The following chapter concludes this small scale research study and the research process is evaluated, considered and reflected upon.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction
This concluding chapter begins with a reflection on this research study. Following this a summary of the main outcomes will be presented. Recommendations for future practice, policy and further research will then be addressed and lastly a final thought is shared.

6.2 Reflection
Evaluating and reflecting on the study has helped recognise its strengths and limitations. The semi-structured interviews and unstructured group time with children, was advantageous in the collection of participants perspectives as was the joint interviewing of parents. Using semi-structured interviews individually with teachers enabled them to share, without judgement, their knowledge, experiences, attitudes and views on the effectiveness of this transition for children in this setting. The unstructured group time with children appears to have worked really well. Whilst interviews or questionnaires could have been used, this method was less intrusive and children were able to contribute to the research whilst feeling comfortable in a common naturalistic experience for them. Having a large group of children appeared to work well in the sense that the children appeared relaxed with their friends around them.

To some extent, the use of open-ended questionnaires for parents were useful in gaining their perceptions. However the joint interview with parents using the same questions yielded far richer responses; having parents together allowed elaboration on answers as they appeared to respond to each other’s experiences (May, 2011).

Looking back, a focus group with parents would have been more beneficial for parents to share their experiences and, if compared to the joint interview, would have yielded a wealth of rich information for the study. It was disappointing to receive a 6.7% response rate to questionnaires. On reflection, it has been considered that parents may
have seen the open-ended questions as time consuming, to which Greetham (2009) believes can lead to incorrect completion of questionnaires or not being completed at all. It is recognised that this may have been the case due to having a 37.7% consent rate for children to participate in the research; consent forms for children’s perspectives were distributed to parents alongside the questionnaire. The structured nature of the methods used to gain parents perceptions, allowed for the same open-ended questions to be asked which in turn allowed an achievable degree of standardisation (Mukherji & Albon, 2009).

The data yielded from all four methods was coded to check for consistencies of themes. Prior to discussion, data was presented under the headings of the research questions; to provide a truthful account of the research process as well as showing the triangulation of methods. This data was then discussed; the outcomes of this discussion follow.

6.3 Outcomes of this Study

The aim of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage (FS) to Key Stage One (KSO). The responses gained were linked to the five research questions posed in order to understand the aspects that contribute to a smooth transitional process. The key components recognised to facilitate a smooth transition, in this study, were found to be; an effective learning environment that mirrors the previous FS environment as much as possible, effective communication between all involved in the transition and children having secure, trusting relationships with those around them.

Teaching staff having knowledge of the FS framework and experience in delivering it, was found to be a key element of practice that supports the transition into KSO. Links between this experience and the pedagogy of the staff were evident. Parents were happy in terms of information sharing prior to the transition but felt more could have been done post transition.
Having the FS follow the same literacy and numeracy programmes appears to be beneficial in supporting the learning environment in KSO. Using this as a continuum has worked well for the setting, to reduce the ‘work culture’ shock for children. Children mainly responded positively in regards to these programmes and appear to be enjoying them as much in KSO as they did in FS. Parents and staff both recognised that the increase of play based learning has benefitted the children in terms of well-being and academic progress. Having more play based experiences introduced has enabled a smoother transition for the children involved.

Strategies implemented by this setting were found to support a successful transition for children. The ethos of ensuring the environment is ready for the children, opposed to making children ready for the environment is evident within this setting. The implementation of a buddying system works well in preparing children for the transition.

The data revealed that relationships between the setting and families is held high in regard. Teachers frequently referred to the importance of effective communication with families; parents spoke highly of the communication they receive. Whilst the Key Person Approach is in good practice in the FS, teachers felt it was no longer needed in KSO. The programme that replaces this approach, Relax Kids, was reported to be an effective approach that is working well in children’s personal, social and emotional development.

In regards to how children feel about the transitional period, this study found children to prefer the play in FS than that in KSO. It further found that the emotions felt, by children during this transitional period, are conflicting. Whilst more than half of the children expressed positive feelings about moving into year one, only seven children expressed they were happy now. Children referred to ‘other’ friends and wanting to play with them; representing that some children may be missing the friendships built in the FS as the cohort separated into three KSO classes.
6.4 Future Practice

In order to establish a more all-inclusive understanding of how effective this transition is for children and their learning, it is acknowledged that additional detailed research is necessary. It is evident that children’s perceptions are key in understanding if the transition process is working for them; further research with children would benefit this area of ECEC. From the findings of this small scale research study, tentative recommendations can be made.

6.41 Recommendation for the Setting

It is evident through the research that the KSO children, within this setting, are benefitting from the ethos and pedagogy of the KSO teaching team. The setting does not currently hold a policy for transition. However, the researcher has been invited to help the setting write a transition policy. It is recommended that the current ethos of the KSO team is implemented into the policy to aid smoother transitions in the future.

6.42 Recommendation for Policy Makers

It is recommended that Government reconsider the way in which KSO children are taught. Currently there is clear disparity, in policy, in which the two curriculums are taught; some five year olds experiencing the play based learning of FS whilst some five year olds are having to conform to the adult led learning in year one. This study highlighted that having experience working with children in the FS goes some way in facilitating a smoother transition for children. It is therefore suggested that all teachers should have experience and understanding of the framework that supports the Early Years Foundation Stage.

6.5 Final Thought

It is much easier to settle and be confident if all those involved have communicated together beforehand, discussed expectations and scaffolded the process by providing relevant experiences, establishing positive relationships and making the culture meaningful. Fabian (2013, p.52).
References


