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Play-based pedagogy under threat? A small-scale study of teachers' and pupils' perceptions of pedagogical discontinuity in the transition to primary school

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Play-based pedagogy under threat? A small-scale study of teachers' and pupils' perceptions of pedagogical discontinuity in the transition to primary school

This study explored teachers' and pupils' perceptions of pedagogical discontinuity in the transition from Reception to Year 1. Data were collected through interviews with one Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and one Year 1 teacher in the same setting. A questionnaire distributed to Year 1 children (n = 23) provided supplementary data. Findings revealed that teachers and pupils were aware of pedagogical discontinuity in the transition from EYFS to Year 1. Teachers attributed pedagogical discontinuity to the constraints of the National Curriculum. Pressures to ensure children are 'school ready' also have implications for bridging pedagogical discontinuity through play.

Keywords: pedagogical discontinuity; transition; bridging; play-based pedagogy; national curriculum.

Introduction

The transition from a play-based curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (ages 4-5) to a purely content-based Year 1 (ages 5-6) represents the first significant shift in children's education (Howe 2016). As is now widely accepted in the field, children's academic and emotional capabilities can be negatively impacted if a smooth transition is not well supported (Bateson 2013; OECD 2006). Although there is no established method for measuring successful transition, a strong sense of belonging in new settings for children reflects a positive transition to formalised learning (Brooker 2007).

Within the literature, a range of theoretical perspectives have been applied to enhance our understanding of educational transitions. For example, 'rites of passage' (Van Gennep, Vizedom and Caffee 1960) and 'border crossings' (Peters 2014) are two concepts that have been previously applied to school transitions. For the purpose of this study, Dunlop and Fabian's (2007) and later Huser, Dockett and Perry's (2015) perceptions of transition as a "metaphorical bridge" between pre-school services and the first year of formal schooling is the most applicable theoretical perspective. Huser and colleagues (2015, p. 440) assert that 'a bridge between preschool and school can promote connections, particularly between the

familiar and unfamiliar; provide support as a passage is navigated and serve as a platform for guiding that passage’.

Applying the bridge metaphor highlights potential for challenges to smooth transition associated with discontinuity between the EYFS and Year 1 curriculums. There is growing recognition within the body of educational transition research that is indicative of a particular focus on educational discontinuities (Kakvoulis 2014; Walsh et al. 2008). Docket and Perry (2012) document that in some instances children pursue discontinuity in order to stimulate new experiences. However, influential research contends that the discontinuity between the EYFS and Year 1 is overly demanding (Ofsted 2004; Sanders et al. 2005). A study conducted by Ofsted (2006) reported that in comparison to their Danish and Finnish counterparts, English teachers felt caught between Foundation Stage (now EYFS) and Key Stage One expectations. This is a common theme throughout the literature as several studies have elucidated the lack of bridging between early childhood education and formal schooling (Barblett et al. 2011; OECD 2006; Ofsted, 2017).

Transition from EYFS to Year 1

The international literature base identifies that young children must negotiate an abundance of discontinuities as they progress from the EYFS to their first year in primary school (Dockett and Perry 2012; Huser et al. 2015; Yeboah 2002). The literature affirms that there are systematic differences between these two phases of education with regards to: the physical environment; curriculum content; classroom organisation; and pupil-teacher ratio (Boyle and Petriwskyj 2014; Chan 2012; Dockett and Perry 2012; Yeboah 2002). Whilst all of these discontinuities impact on children’s transitions differently, there is a strong consensus that pedagogical discontinuities are the most pertinent with regard to the polarisation of EYFS and Year 1 provision (Fisher 2009, 2011; Sanders at al. 2005; White and Sharp 2007). Evidently, there is an absence of bridging between these phases of education meaning children are at risk of

experiencing an abrupt transition to formal schooling (Dunlop and Fabian 2007; Huser et al. 2015).

Promoting connections

Central to early childhood education is a child-centred and responsive approach to educating young children. Research indicates that high-quality early years education, characterised by child-centred approaches which provide ample opportunity for learning through play, has a positive impact on a child's future learning (Sylva et al. 2004). Play-based approaches to educating young children allow teachers to take advantage of the increased motivational and behavioural benefits associated with a play-based pedagogy (Bennett et al. 1997; Howard 2010). For example, play-based pedagogy can support all-round development, promoting children's cognitive, creative, emotional, physical and social competencies (Whitebread et al. 2012; Wood and Attfield 2005).

The EYFS implements a 'purposeful' play-based curriculum where teachers must 'respond to each child's emerging needs and interests' (DfE 2017, 9). Evidently, implementing a play-based curriculum beyond the EYFS in order to avoid excessive pedagogical discontinuity could positively impact children's transition to Year 1. A consistent finding reported within the literature is that teachers are enthusiastic about extending play into primary school settings (Martlew et al. 2011; Nolan and Paatsch 2017; Walsh, McGuinness, Sproule and Trew 2010). However, requirements of the National Curriculum in Year 1 result in teachers and children following more prescribed programmes of study (DfE, 2013). A strong focus on accountability and attainment targets (Martlew et al. 2011) also poses difficulties for teachers.

The divergent philosophical approaches to educating young children that underpin the EYFS and Year 1 are widely referred to in the literature (Fisher 2009; Howe 2016; White and Sharp 2007), indicating pedagogical discontinuity. Research has shown that teachers have raised concerns about the extent to which they can effectively implement a play-based

pedagogy to support children's transition into Year 1, whilst ensuring that they are covering all aspects of the curriculum (Nolan and Paatsch 2017; Walsh et al. 2010). In support of these findings, Fisher (2009) contended that the learning outcomes specified by the National Curriculum heavily shape teaching and learning in the early primary years. This indicates pedagogical tension between the EYFS and Year 1 (Dockett and Perry 2012; Roberts-Holmes 2012).

While the literature outlined above indicates that most early childhood scholars and practitioners would advocate for extension of a play-based pedagogy into Year 1 to support smooth transitions, recent reports indicate a worrying trend towards the reverse. For example, *Bold Beginnings*, a report published by Ofsted (2017), which researched the reception curriculum in a selection ($n = 41$) of 'good' and 'outstanding' primary schools in England, reported that the 'vital smooth transition' from the EYFS to Year 1 'was difficult because the Early Learning Goals were not aligned with the now-increased expectations of the national curriculum' (p. 4). In response to the Ofsted (2017) report, TACTYC (2017) reiterated that the Reception Year 'is not a context for a watered down version of the Key Stage 1 curriculum' (p. 1). However, the literature identifies that wider neoliberal trends, such as accountability measures and more rigorously administered assessments have resulted in the 'downward push' of the National Curriculum which is impacting upon Early Years provision and pedagogy (Alexander 2010; Hood 2013).

The education of young children is increasingly becoming subjected to economic and political reform which undoubtedly informs teacher's pedagogical approach and, in turn, children's learning experiences. This leaves EYFS and Year 1 practitioners engaged in a 'tug of war' regarding who should compromise their pedagogy to accommodate the others. This research, therefore, is designed to contribute to the current literature base concerned with teachers' and pupils' perceptions of pedagogical discontinuity upon the transition to primary school. The purpose of this small-scale research was to investigate whether the idea of

pedagogical discontinuity is noted by teachers and Year 1 pupils and if so, what do they feel causes pedagogical discontinuity between the EYFS and Year 1? The following research questions guided the study:

- (1) Do teachers and pupils perceive pedagogical discontinuity between EYFS and Year 1?
- (2) What do they see as the causes of pedagogical discontinuity?
- (3) Based on these views, to what extent can a play-based pedagogy bridge pedagogical discontinuity?

Methodology

Qualitative data was attained through two individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews; the first with the EYFS teacher and the second with the Year 1 teacher. The purpose of interviewing the EYFS and Year 1 teachers was to gain an insight into their perceptions of pedagogical discontinuity and to explore their perspectives on causes and consequences. In addition, questions were designed to find out teacher perspectives on the extent to which a play-based pedagogy could be implemented to bridge pedagogical discontinuity between the EYFS and Year 1. Both interviews were recorded with an electronic mobile device, transcribed and then the audios were then destroyed. Whilst most questions were specific to the teachers own practice, some questions were the same for both of the teachers. For example, the following questions were asked to both the EYFS and Year 1 teachers: What is the biggest difference between the EYFS and Year 1? And, what are the main benefits of children learning through play?

Quantitative data was also obtained through questionnaire with Year 1 pupils (n = 23). The rationale for including Year 1 children's responses, by means of a questionnaire, was to ascertain their perspectives on EYFS and Year 1 provision, their transition to Year 1 and their attitudes towards a play-based pedagogy. The questionnaire was designed to be short, simple and aesthetically attractive by using emojis and pictures and contained ten structured questions

where the responses were pre-determined. The language of the questions was adjusted to ensure the questions were appropriate, accessible and minimalised power differentials between the child and researcher (Robinson and Kellett 2004). Due to the benefits of establishing personal contact, the questionnaires were administered via individual interviews with each child, conducted by the researcher.

The questionnaire was trialled on a similar age sample (Cohen et al. 2000). Prior to piloting, the questionnaire contained several open questions. However, when the questionnaire was piloted it became apparent that open questions were not suitable for the age group sample (age 5-6) because they did not elicit responses which were relevant to the research questions. Therefore, the questionnaire was edited so that eight of the questions were 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know' closed questions and two questions were designed on a conventional five-point Likert-type scale (Cohen et al. 2000). Although intervals between each point-range may not be equal, the inclusion of Likert-type scales allows the research to make inferences into the respondent's strength of attitude towards a particular statement. As an example, the following question was included in the questionnaire that was completed by Year 1 pupils: Did you enjoy learning through play in the EYFS?

The research was approved by both the University and by the school where data was collected, in compliance with British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (2011). A professional working relationship was established with a rural Lincolnshire Church of England school one month prior to data collection. This allowed the investigator to convey to the relevant personnel within the school what the data collection would entail.

Results

After transcribing the semi-structured interviews with the EYFS and Year 1 teachers, the researcher used a theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) to analyse the data. A theoretical approach to thematic analysis was selected because data collection was driven by

the researcher's pre-existing knowledge of a lack of pedagogical bridging between the EYFS and Year 1. Therefore, a theoretical thematic analysis meant that data could be coded deductively in order to answer the three specific research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following thematic analysis, the teachers' responses were assigned into themes: the significance of pedagogical discontinuity to teachers, the cause of pedagogical discontinuity and bridging pedagogical discontinuity. These themes were then cross-analysed with the descriptive statistical analysis of Year 1 pupils' questionnaire responses.

The significance of pedagogical discontinuity

Both teachers identified differences between EYFS and Year 1 provision. The EYFS teacher stated, 'We've got play-based learning which is fantastic and that's taken away (in Year 1)'. Conversely, when comparing her practice to the EYFS, the Year 1 teacher admitted 'it is a very different set up' and that Year 1 is more 'structured'. Elaborating on their practice, the EYFS and Year 1 teachers highlighted some of the characteristics of their pedagogical approaches:

EYFS: 'It's learning at their pace. It's learning without them knowing that they are learning. It's really good for social skills as well. They get to choose and it gives them confidence. It's a lovely curriculum.'

Year 1: 'You've just got to sit down and go boom boom boom and get them doing it (formal work)...(I am) restricted in some ways to having to just sit behind a desk. I try and do it quite creatively but when it's a formal sit down for spellings or to do your SPAG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) work it can be difficult because it's very dry. They are not working under the relaxed atmosphere'.

When asked if these two phases of education complement or contradict each other, the EYFS teacher responded, 'I would have said before (the reformed national curriculum) complement

because it was a gentle slope into Year 1 but not now'. The lack of continuity between the EYFS and Year 1 was further accentuated when the EYFS teacher affirmed that upon their transition to Year 1 'some (pupils) are still working on their Early Learning Goals that they haven't achieved yet'.

A lack of pedagogical continuity between the EYFS and Year 1 was also alluded to by the children. Responses from the questionnaire revealed that 87% (n = 20) of Year 1 pupils found the transition to Year 1 a significant change. Despite this change, the data from the questionnaire revealed that the majority of pupils (91.3% n = 21) stated that they enjoyed moving into Year 1. This was echoed by the EYFS teacher who asserted that children enjoy the move to Year 1 'because they're big kids and they are going into a big class'.

Figure 1 (please see below) compares children's learning enjoyment levels between the EYFS and Year 1. Whilst all children enjoyed their time in the EYFS the majority of children (87 % n = 20) stated that they 'really enjoyed' it. Conversely, the results indicate that children's attitudes towards learning in Year 1 were less positive and only 43 % (n = 10) 'really enjoy' Year 1.

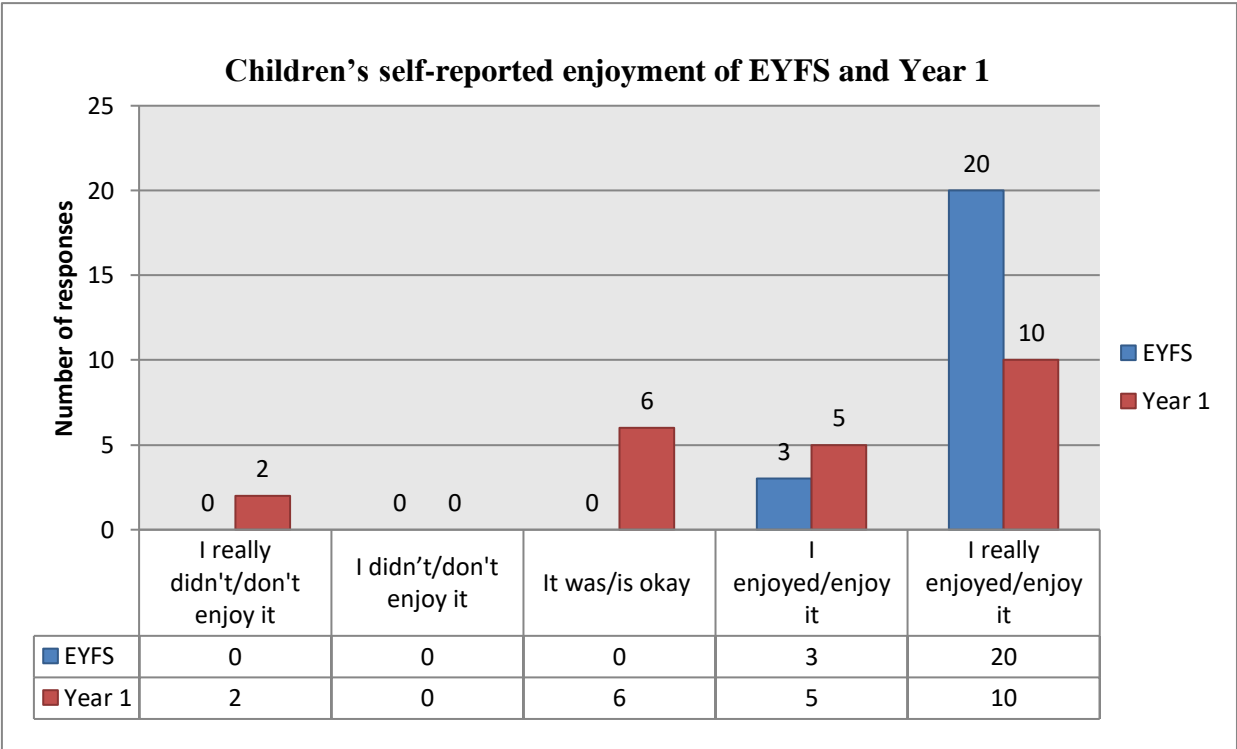


Figure 1. Children's self-reported enjoyment of EYFS and Year 1.

This is significant as the move to Year 1 has meant that some children now perceive their learning to be less enjoyable in comparison to when they were in the EYFS. A potential explanation for this concerning shift in children's enjoyment levels across the transition is the move away from a play-based curriculum, as evidenced by both teachers. Responses to the questionnaire indicated that 95.7% (n = 22) of children enjoyed learning through play in the EYFS and 87% (n = 20) of the children stated that they wish they could have more opportunities to learn through play in Year 1. In addition, 82.6% (n = 19) of Year 1 children stated that they preferred to choose their own activity. Unlike the National Curriculum, this preference can be accommodated by EYFS provision as children move along a continuum of play-based pedagogy where teachers make ongoing decisions regarding their level of involvement in and structure of children's learning (Zosh et al. 2017). Therefore, pedagogical discontinuity, which is characterised by the move away from a flexible play-based curriculum and towards a structured National Curriculum, could be perceived to contribute to the reduction in children's enjoyment of learning.

The EYFS teacher was aware of the connection between a reduction in play and a reduction in children's enjoyment of learning. When asked about the disadvantages of children's move to Year 1, she commented that 'There's not enough play in the (Year 1) curriculum'. In accordance with the literature, the Year 1 teacher focused on barriers of including a play-based pedagogy within the Year 1 curriculum in her comments:

EYFS: They get to play with their friends... It's (play-based pedagogy) just such a better way of teaching young children. they get to explore the different things and that's taken away (in Year 1).'

Year 1: I like them to think that they have free choice but there is a difference because you just have to cover it (National Curriculum).'

The interview also elicited that the Year 1 teacher uses play as an incentive to help meet the expectations of the National Curriculum, rather than as a pedagogical approach. The Year 1 teacher stated that ‘because of the amount that you have to get through with the (National) curriculum, I do use it (play) as a sort of incentive so if you have done your work you can go on and choose an activity’. The data revealed that under half of Year 1 pupils (43.5%, n = 10) believe that they are learning when they are playing suggesting that a classroom environment which incentivises play can contribute to the emergence of a play-work dichotomy where children begin to perceive work as learning and play as recreation.

Causes of pedagogical discontinuity

Both teachers identified curriculum content as the most significant aspect of the transition between EYFS and Year 1:

EYFS: ‘it’s obviously the curriculums... the jump is massive. They are so young you know. They are five and they are expected to do this enormously hard curriculum now. I mean the teachers are creative don’t get me wrong... it’s just in Year 1 they haven’t got so much time now to be wowwy and zowwy and creative. There are so many objectives now to get through’.

Year 1: The curriculum content is huge that they (the Year 1 children) have to cover ... there are so many objectives to get through. The curriculum makes that (transition) difficult. It’s a huge jump. They (the children) need familiarity to feel confident and safe’.

Whilst the Year 1 teacher stated that she was delivering a ‘very prescriptive’ National Curriculum, the EYFS teacher expressed that the EYFS statutory framework allows the children to explore and follow their interests. The teachers’ perspectives further reiterate that curriculum

frameworks can impact upon pedagogy. In this instance, the highly prescriptive nature of the English National Curriculum has resulted in the Year 1 teacher implementing a formal pedagogy to meet specific outcomes. The shift is also reflected in children's perspective on changes in their learning experiences between Reception and Year 1.

Bridging pedagogical discontinuity through play

Both teachers were enthusiastic about the value of play. Unsurprisingly therefore, when questioned about extending a play-based pedagogy into Year 1 in order to offer children a continuous learning experience, both teachers shared similar perspectives:

EYFS: 'No, absolutely not (play should not be confined to the EYFS)... it should go through to at least the end of Year 1 if not Year 2'.

Year 1: 'Definitely, we'd like to do more through play. Your EYFS needs to be brought into Key Stage One'.

However, when discussing bridging curriculum and pedagogical discontinuities through play, the Year 1 teacher expressed how she was torn between delivering a highly structured National Curriculum and wanting 'to do more through play'. It was clear that the Year 1 teacher understood the benefits of a play-based pedagogy. The Year 1 teacher stated that 'If they could do it through their interests and play I think their learning would accelerate'. However, further discussion again revealed that the constraints of the National Curriculum prevented the Year 1 teacher implementing a play-based pedagogy. The Year 1 stated, 'I love role play... and the reading corner ... I could use that so much more but then I'm going I've got to get this, this, this and this and that done'. When asked if the pressure applied by the downward push affected her own practice, the EYFS teacher stated:

EYFS: ‘Absolutely, I’ve always challenged my children. I have always pushed them and in the summer term especially I am frantically trying to prepare them for what’s coming. Academically they are not ready. Socially they are not ready. They are not ready to be pinned down. They (government) don’t realise that their little brains aren’t developed for all of this hard work’.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate a specific aspect that has been identified as characterising the transition from the EYFS to Year 1. It attempted to assess if pedagogical discontinuity is significant to teachers and pupils and if so, what causes pedagogical discontinuity between the EYFS and Year 1. The sentiments provided by the teachers and pupils support the literature (Fisher 2009, 2011) in indicating that pedagogical discontinuities characterise differences in EYFS and Year 1 provision. This was highlighted by the EYFS teacher who, in line with previous research (DfE 2015; Fisher 2011), affirmed that upon their transition to Year 1 some pupils have not completed their Early Learning Goals. This is significant as the Early Learning Goals represent what children are expected to achieve by the end of their time in the EYFS (Bingham and Whitebread 2012). Completing the Early Learning Goals contributes to a child being classified as ‘reaching a good level of development’ which, in turn, is identified as an indicator of school readiness (PHE 2015). This holds importance as children who are ready for school are most likely to experience a positive transition to Year 1 (Yeboah 2002). However, the disclosure that some children do not achieve their Early Learning Goals coupled with new research which suggests that they are not aligned with the increased expectations of the National Curriculum (Ofsted 2017), further polarises pedagogical practices between these two phases of education and thus, further problematises children’s transition to Year 1. This has consequences for the transition to Year 1 as the Early Learning Goals that

children are expected to attain to reach a 'good level of development' does not guarantee that they will be ready for the demands of Year 1. This places more children at risk of experiencing an abrupt transition to Year 1 and supports the research which indicates that Year 1 provision fails to offer children from the EYFS a continuous learning experience (Barblett et al. 2011; OECD 2006).

The children's perspectives of pedagogical discontinuity also confirmed previous research. In line with White and Sharp (2007), Year 1 children consistently identified notable differences in their learning environment after their transition from the EYFS. Despite these differences, the majority of children made the transition to Year 1 successfully, which is consistent with findings from previous research (Margetts 2007; Sharp 2006; White and Sharp 2007). The data from the questionnaire accurately represented this perspective as 91.3% (n = 21) of pupils stated that they have enjoyed moving into Year 1. Both teachers, in line with Ecclestone (2009), acknowledged that transitions are important periods within children's lives and must therefore be approached carefully. The teachers within this study had a strong commitment to making children's move to Year 1 a smooth and stress-free transition. This commitment was reflected by the teachers indicating that they have a 'really close' working relationship consisting of constant dialogue before, during and after children's transition to Year 1. They also stated that the location of the two classrooms, which are right next to each other, meant they could easily communicate and share information about the children. Elsewhere, it has been documented that for young children, the move to Year 1 is met with enthusiasm as it encompasses the perception of becoming more 'grown up' (Dockett and Perry 2012; Walsh et al. 2008) and the opportunity to learn new things (Fabian and Dunlop 2006).

Whilst the transition to Year 1 was successful for most children, pedagogical discontinuity can have an impact upon children's enjoyment of learning (Sharp 2006). The results support this, as most children stated that they 'really enjoyed' their time in the EYFS. This correlates with research conducted by Garrick et al. (2010) who suggested that children's

needs and interests in the EYFS are mostly catered for. However, Year 1 children's attitudes towards their enjoyment of Year 1 were less positive. Given the importance of play throughout the sensitive period (age 0-7) (Gleave and Cole-Hamilton 2012) it could be suggested that a reduction in opportunities for children to direct their own learning and learn through play, as evidenced by both teachers within this study, impacts upon children's enjoyment of Year 1. Indeed, 87% of children stated that they would like more opportunities to learn through play in Year 1. This is in accordance with previous research which indicates that upon their transition, Year 1 pupils noted the curtailment of play-based activities (Sanders et al. 2005; Walsh et al. 2008; White and Sharp 2007).

In discussing the contrasting role of a play-based pedagogy in both classrooms, both teachers identified that pedagogical discontinuity is significant between these two phases of education. The EYFS teacher's response aligns with the Department for Education (2017) in stating that 'Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others' (p. 9). However, the data suggests that upon the transition to Year 1, a play-based pedagogy moves from a proximal position to a peripheral position in children's learning. This was highlighted by the Year 1 teacher's reference to the use of play as an incentive in her classroom, rather than as a pedagogical approach. The Year 1 teacher, in accordance with Hayes (2012), conceded that she incentivises play as a strategy to engage children to participate in more formalised learning. This strategy means that opportunities to learn through play are reduced to an activity that children are allowed to do once they have finished their 'work'. This reconceptualises what a play-based pedagogy means to young children and, as highlighted in this study can contribute to the emergence of a play-work dichotomy (Howard 2002). Relegating play to the periphery of young children's learning experience could be seen to contribute to the pedagogical discontinuity which polarises EYFS and Year 1 provision.

Causes of pedagogical discontinuity

In accordance with Boyle and Petriwskyi (2014) and Yeboah (2002) the teachers identified curriculum content as an aspect of the transition which contributed to children experiencing a lack of continuity. The statutory framework for the EYFS asserts that each area of learning and development - literacy, numeracy, understanding the world and expressive arts and design - 'must be implemented through planned, purposeful play' (DfE 2017, 9). In comparison, Year 1 teachers in local authority schools are obliged to follow a national curriculum which is organised through prescribed programmes of study (DfE 2014). Unlike the EYFS framework, the National Curriculum does not promote a particular pedagogical approach 'as long as the content of the national curriculum programmes of study is taught to all pupils' (DfE 2014, 6). However, both curriculum content and pedagogy can influence a child's learning experience (Sanders et al. 2005) and it is proposed that the content of a national curriculum has the capacity to influence pedagogy (Fisher 2009). Gert Biesta (2014), in agreement, asserts that 'pedagogy operates precisely in the middle ground between the child and the curriculum' (31).

The inextricable link between curriculum and pedagogy was perceptible when the Year 1 teacher referred to the prescriptive nature of the National Curriculum and commented that she has, at times, no alternative than to implement a formal approach. It could be argued that the highly prescriptive nature of the English National Curriculum programmes of study (Brundrett 2015) has resulted in the Year 1 teacher implementing a formal pedagogy to meet specific outcomes. The Year 1 teacher's sentiments suggest that as soon as children commence Year 1 they encounter a learning environment that encourages teachers to replace complex and multilateral conceptions of pedagogy, as afforded by a play-based EYFS curriculum, in favour of imparting knowledge which can be easily assessed and accounted for under the process of performativity (Pinar 2014). This elicits consistencies with the belief that precise and

measurable outcomes, which are characteristic of market-based principles, underpin neoliberal education policies (Ball 2003).

In contrast, the EYFS teacher's responses reflect the literature that emphasises the benefits of play (Bennett et al. 1997; Whitebread et al. 2012; Wood and Attfield 2005) and the appropriateness (Fisher 2011; Walsh et al. 2006) of a play-based pedagogy. In addition, the EYFS teacher's responses correspond with the literature which promotes play as the principal pedagogical approach to educating young children (Howard 2002). It is clear that both teachers within this study use their respective curriculum frameworks to inform their practice. In doing so, the teachers are put in a position that results in them accentuating the pedagogical discontinuity between the EYFS and Year 1.

Bridging pedagogical discontinuity through play

An aspect of this research was to assess the extent to which pedagogical discontinuities between the EYFS and Year 1 could be 'bridged' through play (Huser et al. 2015). Consistent with other research (Nolan and Paatsch 2017; Martlew et al. 2011; Walsh et al. 2010), the interviews elicited that both teachers were enthusiastic about the value of play. In line with Alexander (2010), both teachers were adamant that the pedagogical approach implemented in the EYFS should be extended to the whole of Key Stage One (ages 5-7). Furthermore, the teachers' sentiments are congruent with the findings of The Hundred Review (Early Excellence 2017). The report, which implemented a comprehensive review of current practice and provision of the Reception Year, disclosed that 97% of participants believe that Year 1 provision should resemble that in Reception as children commence Year 1 (Early Excellence 2017, 29). Naturally therefore, because play was held in high regard by both teachers, further questioning discussed the extent to which pedagogical discontinuity could be bridged through extending play into Year 1.

Bridging pedagogical discontinuity through a play-based pedagogy represented a dilemma for the Year 1 teacher. It was clear that the Year 1 teacher understood the benefits of a play-based pedagogy. However, the interview revealed that the constraints of the National Curriculum prevented the Year 1 teacher from implementing a play-based pedagogy. It could be perceived that the Year 1 teacher is vacillating between a play-based pedagogy, of which she is a strong advocate, and implementing a formal pedagogy, which she perceives as best suited to meet all aspects of the National Curriculum. This led to play being at the periphery of children's learning experience in Year 1 whereby play was implemented as an incentive for children to finish formal learning. The conflicting educational objectives between the EYFS and Year 1 can mean teachers' professional expertise and judgement are suppressed by the constraints placed on schools to deliver prescribed educational outcomes (Athola et al. 2012; Moyles 2001). Howard (2002) and Ball (2003) suggested that this dilemma can have a detrimental effect as the requirements of the curriculum can appear to disempower practitioners.

Worryingly, the pressure applied by the National Curriculum not only has implications for the role of play in bridging pedagogical discontinuity but also casts uncertainty over its place in the EYFS. Despite the EYFS statutory framework stipulating that all teaching and learning must be implemented through play (DfE 2017), recent years have seen increasing political pressure being applied on the EYFS to ensure that children entering Year 1 are ready for learning (Bingham and Whitebread 2012; Neaum 2016). Indeed, Ofsted's (2017) report revealed that school leaders regard 'preparing children for the demands of Year 1' as an important characteristic of EYFS provision (12). This has seen the purpose of early childhood education recontextualised resulting in pedagogical 'sites of struggle' (Moyles 2015) and a 'conflict of interests' (Rogers 2010) for Early Years practitioners as the demands placed upon teachers to meet particular objectives confronts teachers' belief that children should have ample opportunities for play (Rogers 2010, 22). This was directly perceptible as the EYFS teacher, despite being a strong advocate of a play-based pedagogy, conceded that in the summer term

prior to children's transition to Year 1 she adjusts her pedagogy in an attempt 'to frantically prepare them (her pupils) for what's coming'. The intrusive nature of national curricula has led some academics to concede that 'play is being eliminated from the early childhood curriculum' (Saracho 2012, p. 5). This puts practitioners in a precarious position as premature exposure to formal learning is damaging to children's academic, social and emotional development (Margetts 2007).

Evidently, the EYFS teacher's responses support the notion that the downward push of the National Curriculum is impacting upon early childhood education (Alexander 2010; Hood 2013). In accordance with Docket and Perry (2012), the EYFS teacher attempted to resist the downward push of the National Curriculum. However, her admission that she formalises her practice in the term prior to children's transition to Year 1 highlights a lack of bridging between the EYFS and Year 1 (Huser et al. 2015). Therefore, the data suggests that in accordance with Dockett and Perry (2014) the transition to Year 1 is a one-way activity where, in order to address curriculum and pedagogical discontinuities, EYFS teachers are expected to adjust their pedagogy prematurely so that it aligns with the expectations of Year 1.

This study has contributed to the comprehensive literature base that is concerned with children's learning experiences upon their transition from the EYFS to Year 1. It was evident throughout this study that both teachers and pupils recognised the value of play and would welcome the opportunity to bridge pedagogical discontinuity through a play-based pedagogy. However, in light of intensifying National Curriculum pressure, the stage at which pedagogical discontinuity is addressed is increasingly impacting upon EYFS provision. Therefore, the findings from this study align with the concerning perception of the EYFS whereby its purpose is to prepare children for formal learning (Bingham and Whitebread 2012; Howe 2016). It should be acknowledged that the findings from this study are taken from a small sample size and therefore should not be generalised (Cohen et al. 2000). Further research into the extent to which the EYFS and Year 1 offer a bridged partnership should seek to ascertain the perspectives

of a wider range of teachers and pupils. Particular emphasis should be placed on researching the relationship between a reduction in play-based pedagogy and children's self-reported enjoyment of learning. Further to this, research which aims to show how schools can successfully implement a play-based pedagogy up to and beyond the transition to Year 1 whilst still ensuring children attain National Curriculum outcomes would be particularly valuable.

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Biographical note:

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