

I am the Year One teacher at Netley Marsh Infant School. I am also a part-time PhD student at University of Winchester. The principle aim of my research is to improve the quality of transition between Year R and Year One in our school. The following is a brief outline of my research field.

### Children as experts in infant school transitions

#### Thesis Overview

##### Background/Rationale

When young children move settings, phase or year group or from one style of pedagogy to another their power status in relation to adults is diminished (Clark and Moss, 2005). As they progress through the education system (via a series of transitions) they inevitably encounter yet more changes and shifts in identity and agency (Ecclestone, Hayes, Biesta and Hughes, 2009). The transit from Year R to Year One traditionally involves an abrupt change from play-based curriculum to more formal approaches to learning (Fisher 2010; Oxford 2006, 2009). The very fact that the two year groups fall within different bands of education ('Early Years' and 'Key Stage One') and follow different programmes of study ('Foundation Stage' and 'National Curriculum') serves to highlight the rift between year groups. The culture of Year One classrooms is often very different from Foundation Stage classrooms (Brooker, 2002; Dockett and Perry, 2007). Not only does the educational philosophy, teaching style and structure of education vary considerably (Fabian and Dunlop, 2007) so do the expectations placed upon children (Fabian and Dunlop, 2007). Young children who are used to learning which is embedded in context, are suddenly expected to apply their thinking to the abstract or unfamiliar (Donaldson, 1978, p.121). This means having to learn the social rules and values of a new community, as well as coming to terms with changes in identity, roles and relationships (Griebel and Niesel, 2000). The transition from the Year R to Year One, therefore, can be particularly disempowering for the young children concerned.

The imbalance of power that exists between experienced and non-experienced children, and between adults and children, during a period of transition is disconcerting. Children are more vulnerable to unequal power relationships in research than other groups (Robinson and Kellett, 2004; Punch, 2002). Adults are generally in a position of power and the status of children is diminished when they enter a period of transition (Clark and Moss, 2005). One way of addressing imbalances is to give children control of the transition process (Clark and Moss, 2005) and involve them in research into transition (Dockett and Perry, 1999). Methods which enable children to demonstrate their perspectives supply practitioners with an informed starting point for supporting learning (Clark and Moss, 2005).

##### Wider Context

Children have unique perspectives of matters which are important to them (Clark and Moss, 2005). They are principal stakeholders in policy and practice (Tolfree and Woodhead, 1999). Their perspectives in the critique and reform of education are relevant and important (Cook-Sather, 2002). However, children's voices are not always recognised or considered (Qvortrup, 2004). Children have traditionally been defined by their perceived 'incompetence' in relation to adults (Storrie, 1997; Roche, 1999). Adult perceptions of children are dominated by discourses which portray them as innocent and vulnerable (Devine, 1998). Their capacities as 'active agents' have often been undermined by a protective approach, which encourages dependence (Storrie, 1997). Consequently, children have rarely been considered as social actors with a voice of their own (Devine, 2002). Children's perceptions of themselves in relation to adults and society are inevitably influenced by such discourses. Within the context of school, children are traditionally positioned as subordinate (Devine, 2002). Hence, there is a strong interrelation between discourse, identity and practice in the structure of adult-child relations in school.

Recent advances in the way in which society perceives children and childhood (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) highlight the positioning of children in relation to adults and how children's minority status impacts on the way they are regarded within society (Corsaro, 1997; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, Qvortrup, 1994). Children's rights to participate and express their views freely in matters that affect them, are outlined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Lansdown, 1996). Advocates for children's rights challenge hierarchical patterns of association, in favour of recognition of the interdependencies and interconnectedness of adults' and children's lives (Roche, 1999). Revised approaches to citizenship challenge assumptions regarding the inability of children to be actors in their own right. A growing emphasis on connectedness, interdependence and community points the way towards acknowledgement of children's competencies and a commitment to inclusion of children's voices on matters which directly affect them (Roche, 1999; Cockburn, 1998).

My interest in transition has developed over many years. I have been a teacher and early years' practitioner for more than 25 years. I am also a mother of two. I spent four years researching transition from Pre-school to Year R at a Masters level. Hence, I have experienced transition from a number of perspectives. My interest in power relations during times of transition come from two interrelated perspectives. Firstly, I am Year One teacher with a responsible commitment to ensure that young children's transition into Year One is a positive experience. Secondly, I have also recently transitioned into Year One from my former position as Year R teacher. My research explores power relations in my own immediate context during this time of transition.

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