"I don't really like the thing what you do, I like it more because you get the stickers": the impact of rules and rewards on children's transition experiences.

Charlotte Wilders and Rachael Levy

Charlotte Wilders: Independent Researcher, Melbourne, Australia; Department of Rachael Levy: Leadership and Learning, Institute of Education, University College London, England.

Charlotte Wilders, email: char.ruth@icloud.com

Dr Charlotte Wilders is an Early Years / Primary teacher who has taught in England, Belgium and Australia. She completed her Doctor of Education with the University of Sheffield, England. Her main interests are early childhood literacy, transitions between phases of education and the use of formative assessment within primary schools.

Dr Rachael Levy has recently taken up the position of Associate Professor with the Department of Leadership and Learning at the Institute of Education, University College London. Previous to this Rachael was a Lecturer in Early Years Education at the University of Sheffield, England and was also course director for the EdD.

"I don't really like the thing what you do, I like it more because you get the stickers": the impact of rules and rewards on children's transition experiences.

Abstract

Children's early experiences of educational transition can be a critical step in their life-long learning journey, yet we know very little about their perceptions of this experience. This paper draws on the findings of a participatory study, which identified rules and rewards as being significant factors for children transitioning from an early childhood education setting to the first year of primary school in a European school in a major city in Belgium. This case study accessed the voices of six children, their parents and the teaching staff. The findings indicated that the children perceived both sanctions and rewards to be important in the enforcement of classroom rules. However, the children expressed concerns about their ability to adapt their behaviour to meet the cultural expectations of the setting and were troubled about the impact this could have on their social belonging. Furthermore, learning dispositions were found to be inhibited by both ambiguous criteria for success and the desire to earn rewards. This paper recommends that educators give careful consideration to the ways in which rules and rewards impact upon children's experiences of transition.

Keywords: transitions, rules, rewards, children's perceptions

Introduction

Children's earliest experiences in school can be fundamental in establishing a positive relationship with school-based learning (Cassidy 2005). Intrinsic to this is children's early experience of transition which is a critical factor in their future success in school

and life-long learning (Einarsdottir 2011; Margetts 2002, 104). How children experience this transition influences future 'educational and social-emotional development' (Skouteris, Watson, and Lum 2012, 84). This assertion is supported by O'Kane (2016), whose review of international research, literature and policy revealed that positive transition experiences were strongly related to future social, emotional and academic success within school.

Yet despite this recognition, the literature also indicates that many children do not have successful experiences of transition from one year group to another, with Brooker (2008) warning that many children experience feelings of disappointment and discouragement following early educational transitions. Moreover, the transition from early childhood education to primary school is acknowledged by Holsted (2015, 01) to be a 'period of vulnerability for many children'. Niesel and Griebel (2007, 22) add from their review of relevant studies that 'about one-third to one-half of new school children show behaviour that has been described as adaptation problems, developmental disharmonies or transition reactions', which they argue leads to stress. What is more the literature suggests that this is an issue effecting children within a variety of international contexts (Kinkead-Clark, 2015; Zhang, 2015)

This suggests that we need to learn more about the specific factors that influence young children during episodes of transition within their early education. This paper reports findings from a participatory case study with 6-year-old children who had recently made the transition from an early childhood education setting to Year 1 within the Anglophone section of a European school in Brussels. The early childhood setting at this school was called 'Maternelle', so this term will be used throughout the paper. There were seven different language sections within this European school, and while all sections followed the European School 'Early Childhood Curriculum', each section had

its own specific literacy curriculum. The literacy curriculum for the Anglophone section drew heavily on UK initiatives, which was evident in the fact that the Letters and Sounds Guidance from the English Department of Education and Skills was used as the framework for progression of phonics. Due to this strong influence by English educational policy, this paper draws from literature within English contexts, however implications for international contexts are acknowledged throughout.

Whilst a number of factors influenced the children's experience of transition, the data indicated that the role of 'rules and rewards' had a particularly profound impact on the children during this critical period in their schooling. This study therefore makes a valuable and insightful contribution to existing literature, as very little is currently known about the ways in which rules and rewards affect children's transitional experiences.

The purpose of this paper is to present these findings and discuss their implications for practitioners working with young children during their early years of formal schooling. The next section discusses what is currently known about the challenges children face during transition in their early years, and the role of rules and rewards within this.

Factors that influence transitions and the challenges these pose

The literature highlights a number of factors that affect children's transitions but these largely fall into two main areas; shifts in pedagogical approaches and relationships. This section discusses what is currently known about these factors and explores the role of 'rules' and 'rewards' within.

The literature suggests that relationships are a major challenge to young children's successful transition (Loizou 2011). In particular, Yeboah (2002) reported

that peer relationships are a highly influential factor, as children who make the transition to school with familiar friends are more likely to have a positive experience. Relationships between teacher and child were also seen to influence children's transition experiences, with concerns being raised by Peters (2010) about the possible negative impact on learning, when good child-teacher relationships are not established. Yet further study has shown that the teacher's expectations govern the cultural ethos of the classroom, which in turn creates the social and cultural standards which children are expected to meet (Margetts 2004). This ties in with the concept of rules, as individual teacher expectations contribute towards the formation of classroom rules which regulate the environment. Peters (2010) points out that when a new teacher has different beliefs, ideologies and therefore rules, to a previous teacher, children may struggle to understand what is expected of them. When this is the case children may face sanctions for failing to follow the rules and also be identified as unsuccessful in adopting the cultural values of their new setting.

In addition to relationships, it is also well documented that pedagogical differences between settings is a challenging feature within children's experiences of early educational transitions (Fisher 2009; Cassidy 2005). Brooker (2008) suggests that these pedagogical transitional challenges have been recognised across different international contexts, which is confirmed by Britto's review of the literature (2012), as she states that changes in approaches to teaching and learning are associated internationally with transitional challenges, as children are expected to make adjustments in order to meet the demands of 'new learning environments' (p.8). When such a chasm between pedagogical approaches exists, children may feel that their existing skills and knowledge are not being valued which poses a threat to their established identities (Hughes and Pollard 2006).

Whilst verbal praise for behaviour in early childhood settings is reportedly replaced by extrinsic rewards in primary settings (Brooker 2008), it is recognised to be more common for rewards in primary schools to be given for completion of work than for behaviour (Shreeve et al. 2002; Merret and Jones 1994). This emphasis on 'work' is important because further research has shown that children perceive activities to be 'work', rather than 'play', when they have little autonomy in choosing activities (Goodhall and Atkinson, 2019) and if they have to be quiet during the activity (Wing, 1995). The literature also suggests that children take cues from the environment in establishing what is work; for example they are more likely to see an activity as 'work' if takes place in a formalised context, such as at desks rather than on the floor (Kahyaoglu, 2014; Chapparo and Hooper, 2002). What is more it is also commonly reported that on transition from early childhood settings to primary school, 'work' is perceived by children to become not only more prevalent in the day, but also more difficult (Loizou 2011; Brooker 2008; Sharp et al. 2006).

It has been argued that there is a need to give careful reflection on how reward systems are used in schools (Mansfield, 2007). If rewards are used as a motivational tool to promote learning (Deci, Koestner, and Ryan, 2001), it is essential to understand how children perceive the connection between pedagogical changes and reward systems. While some research has focused on the use of rewards in primary schools in relation to motivation (Cameron 2001; Deci, Koestner and Ryan 2001), with one study showing that there is a potentially positive relationship between the use of rewards and a child's sense of belonging within an educational environment (Mansfield, 2007), little attempt has been made to connect the use of rewards with children's experiences of transition. This study is a contribution towards addressing that omission. The next section

describes the methodology of this study which sought to understand young children's experiences of transition within their early years education.

Context of study and methods

The research was conducted within the Anglophone section of a large European school in a city in Belgium, with participants being selected from the Year 1 class. There are currently thirteen European schools situated across six European countries and schools are governed by the Member States of the European Union with the aim to provide multilingual and multicultural education for children of the employees of the European Institutions. The European school in which this research was conducted consisted of seven different European language sections. Each language section had a Maternelle section (Foundation Stage), a Primary section and a Secondary section. A high proportion of students do not live in the immediate vicinity of the school, and many come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds with a high proportion of them being bilingual. The socio-economic status of the children's families are similar, as at least one, and often both parents, work for the European Institutions and are generally educated to a high standard.

The children in this study came from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and five out of the six children were bilingual. The first author of this paper was employed as a teacher at this setting and had become increasingly concerned about the impact of transition from Maternelle to Year 1 for children. Children in this setting generally spent two years in Maternelle before transitioning to Year 1. Upon this transition the children moved to a new building, followed a new curriculum and began to learn a second language. Moreover, having had just one class teacher and a teaching assistant in

Maternelle, these children would now have a class teacher, a second language teacher, a teacher of religion and a physical education teacher. As these children were experiencing a combination of pedagogical, social and environmental changes it provided an opportunity to research their perceptions of transitional changes.

We were keen to access children's voices in relation to their educational experiences, as it is clear that young children's voices are not always included in education research (Lundy, McEvoy, and Byrne 2011; Birbeck and Drummond 2007). For example, educational practice is frequently under review leading to policy change, however these changes are often based on adults' interpretations of children's experiences (Medina 2001; Vasquez de Velasco 2000) rather than seeking to include the voices of children themselves. Given this concern, we were positioned within an interpretivist paradigm which, as Sikes (2004) discusses, enabled us to gather subjective perceptions in order to understand participants' experiences. A qualitative case study approach allowed us to utilise a range of research activities to 'unravel the complexities' (Denscombe 2010, 53), of this transition experience.

In order to access children's voices we chose to use alternative methods of data collection, which were advocated by Clark and Moss (2001,12), which placed less reliance on 'the written or spoken word', making engagement with the research more accommodating to the voice of the child. Table 1 presents an overview of the research activities that were designed in order to access the voices of the young children in this study. Many of the activities drew on the use of 'Tom and Polly', who were cloth puppets. Tom and Polly were introduced to the children at the beginning of the research; we explained that Tom and Polly wanted to know more about what it was like to move to Year 1.

Table 1. Table of research activities

Activity name	Brief details of activity
First Interview	Semi-structured interview using Tom and Polly - the research puppets.
Drawing Conversation	Children drew pictures to represent their experiences of the two settings, and we conversed with the children as they did so. Tom and Polly (the research puppets) watched so that the children could offer them explanations as they drew.
Playmobil Activity	Children played with small world sets that were set up to resemble the two different settings. We asked questions as they played and joined their play when invited. Once more Tom and Polly watched so that the children were free to engage with them as they played.
Photograph Activity	Children took photographs of the two different settings
Photograph Interview	Semi-structured interview using the children's own photographs as a stimulus for questions and discussion. Tom and Polly were used again.
Photograph and Feelings Interview	Semi-structured interview using the children's own photographs combined with feelings cards as a stimulus for questions and discussion. Tom and Polly were used again.
Guided Tour	The children took the study puppets Tom and Polly on a guided tour of the Year 1 setting. They decided what to show Tom and Polly and what to tell them.
Final Interview	Semi-structured interview using Tom and Polly.

Our aim was not to seek generalisations from a representative sample, but rather to gain understanding from a sample which reflected the gender, ages and demographics of the classroom. We therefore selected one female participant and one male participant from the following three categories; younger children in the class, older children in the class, and children from the middle age range. A manageable number of participants were then selected from those who met the criteria. We used a wide range of research

activities in order to yield in-depth portrayals of individual experiences. See Table 2 for information about the child participants.

Table 2. Table of participants

Child's name:	Age on commencement of study	Gender	Monolingual / bilingual
Bobby	6 years 6 Months	Male	Bilingual (including English)
Leanne	6 Years 11 Months	Female	Bilingual (including English)
Katie	6 Years 3 Months	Female	Bilingual (including English)
Isabelle	6 Years 6 Months	Female	Bilingual (including English)
Sean	6 years 2 Months	Male	Monolingual (English)
Jack	6 Years 11 Months	Male	Bilingual (including English)

 Six parents were interviewed during the study (one per child participant). Five parents were female and one was male. The teaching staff (all female) were selected for interview due to their role within the setting. The Year 1 teacher was very experienced and had worked in this setting for a number of years. The Maternelle teacher was newly qualified and was in her second year teaching at this school. Similarly, one Maternelle teaching assistant was very experienced and had worked at this setting for a number of years, and the other assistant was relatively new to the role, and the school. Given that the purpose of conducting this research was to gain the perceptions of children in

matters which affect them, this was reflected in the research design, which prioritised research activities with the children. However, by interviewing the adults who experienced this transition alongside the children, we were able to gain an 'extra layer of detail' (Clark and Moss 2005), in the form of what parents and teachers perceived to be significant to the children's experiences of transitions.

Adult participants were provided with the necessary details about the project in the form of an information letter. The adults were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any time without explanation. Before commencing the study, the first author met the prospective child participants in order to determine their willingness to participate and gain initial oral consent. A child-friendly explanation of the project was offered to the children, who were also shown the audio recorder that would be used in the project. In addition the children were introduced to the puppets (Tom and Polly), and some of the planned activities were described to them. The child participants in this study were reminded of the research aims at the beginning of each activity; they were also given an explanation of the particular task being carried out on each occasion and were then asked if they were still happy to take part.

To analyse the data, all audio recordings were transcribed and responses were manually highlighted and chunked into initial categories (related to the research questions). This coding process was then repeated using the Nvivo software. We then collated all responses for each identified category and highlighted both common and contradictory perspectives.

Large data profile posters were then created for each child; individual dialogue from transcripts were pasted into each poster and presented within the categories related to the research questions. From this, short vignettes were created for each child, outlining their perceptions of their transition experiences.

Once all data had been combined it was possible to identify emerging themes. The findings reported in this paper are associated with the following theme: **Cultural and social influences on transition experiences:** Rules, teacher expectations and rewards.

Findings and discussion

The findings presented in this study indicate that the rules of the Year 1 setting were enforced by both sanctions and rewards. When asked to describe their Year 1 experiences, classroom rules featured as a prominent discussion point. The impact of rules and sanctions is therefore discussed first.

The role of rules and sanctions

For the Photograph Activity the children were given a digital camera and asked to take photographs of the things they remembered from Maternelle and then things in Year 1 that they would like to show Tom and Polly (the research puppets). Interestingly four out of six participants chose to photograph the Year 1 classroom rules (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Photograph of Year 1 classroom rules
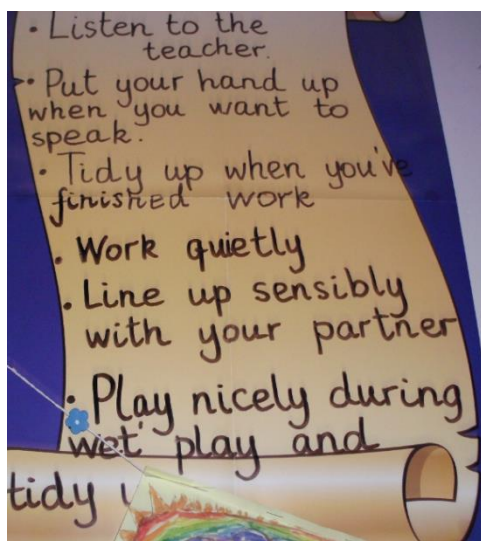
During the Photograph Interview, Jack explained 'look these are the rules you have to do, nothing else than the rules'. Katie also explained that it was important to 'know all the rules' before commencing Year 1. In contrast, none of the children associated rules with their Maternelle experiences which illustrates how rules were perceived to be a significant transitional change. Whilst the children in Loizou's (2011) study felt empowered at knowing the rules of their new setting, the children in this study were concerned about their ability to adapt their behaviour in order to adhere to the rules, and thus negative feelings were expressed with regard to this transitional change.

During the Photograph and Feelings Interview the children were asked to select a photograph to discuss and were then asked to select a 'feelings card' to express how they felt about the photograph. Both Jack and Katie selected worried emotion faces to portray how they felt about the Year 1 rules. Katie explained that she was worried because 'I don't know if I do them correct or something', and Jack added 'if I don't really know the rules, or I forget or, if I do them wrong, then I feel a bit worried'. This data builds on Thornberg's (2007) claim that a smooth transition is not ensured if children simply know the rules, as the children in this present study were also aware that they must be able to adhere to the new rules. Moreover the data revealed that this was something that the children were deeply concerned about.

During the First Interview Isabelle explained, 'if we speak too many times, that means we miss play'. She then reiterated, during the Drawing Conversation, that if you were 'noisy', your name would be written on the board. Jack explained, during the Playmobil Activity, that you had to stay inside at playtime if you were 'naughty', for example if you had been 'talking'. The data revealed that being identified as 'naughty' was associated with social exclusion, as Jack expressed feelings of sadness at being partnered with 'the naughty one on the table', who was 'chattering' and 'playing with

pencils'. Jack was aware that this child was perceived to be 'naughty', and he expressed concerns about being associated with him. Furthermore, he was expected to line up with this partner; this was problematic as one classroom rule was to 'line up sensibly with your partner', and failure to do so could result in a sanction.

In order to avoid social exclusion, the children in this study were aware that they must adapt their learning behaviour, in that they had to learn to work silently. While previous research has shown that children perceive the requirement to 'be quiet' as an indication of the activity being 'work' rather than 'play' (Wing, 1995), these findings demonstrate that the situation is much more serious than this. The project data indicated that failure to be quiet could result in a sanction or in being perceived as 'naughty' by a group they were keen to belong to. Given that research has also shown that children must quickly learn to respond to the cultural expectations of a new setting if they are to acquire pupil status (Lam and Pollard, 2006), this data demonstrates that these children were struggling with these new expectations, particularly as the expectations differed from their previous environment to this new one.

The connection the children made between sanctions and social exclusion from peer groups was evident in their description of the ultimate sanction. To illustrate, when asked during the First Interview, 'is there anything you think Tom and Polly might not like so much about Year 1?' Leanne answered, 'she might not be very happy being in the book'. Jack then explained that when a child had their name entered into the red book 'they have to be sent to Mr B' (Principal), and when you get more than three times to Mr B, then you have to leave the school'.

The data presented indicates that awareness of sanctions influenced the prominence of rules in the Year 1 setting, which in turn influenced the negative perception of rules during the transition experience. Interestingly, just as the threat of

sanctions proved to be a troubling feature of life in Year 1, classroom rules also generated the possibility of 'reward', however this was not necessarily seen as being a positive feature of Year 1.

The role of rules and rewards

The use of rewards was a significant transitional change as the reward system in Year 1 was perceived to be an important aspect of the setting, and no such reward system existed in Maternelle. During the Photograph Activity, five out of the six child participants took a photograph of the group reward chart which was displayed in the Year 1 classroom (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Photograph of group reward chart
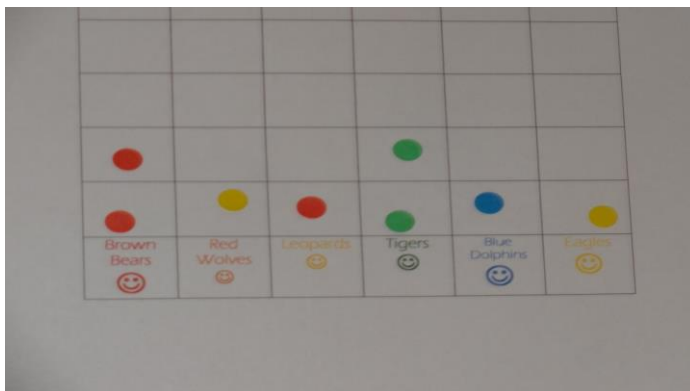
Katie explained that the 'quiet working table' would get a sticker for their table and the group with the most stickers by the end of the week would earn 'golden time', which she reported 'is like when you get to play'. The children talked positively about earning group rewards, with both Sean and Katie selecting an excited face to portray their feelings towards the group reward chart. There was strong consensus that golden time was a most enjoyable aspect of Year 1, and while the children were excited by the prospect of earning rewards, they also expressed feelings of frustration towards this system.

The group reward system was strongly associated with the classroom rule to 'work quietly'. Bobby explained that you would earn a sticker for your group if you 'do

good work and stay quiet', with Isabelle reiterating, 'if we're the quietest table we get a sticker'. Sean confirmed in the Final Interview, 'when you're like chatting a lot she doesn't give you a sticker'. The expectation to 'work quietly' was in contrast to the collaborative experiences of Maternelle, and the Maternelle teacher and Isabelle's mum expressed concerns that the children might miss collaborative group activities, and struggle to adapt to working in a more isolated manner. Samuel confirmed this assertion, explaining during the Drawing Conversation, that he missed group carpet sessions in Maternelle, and then added 'we have to work quietly in Year 1'. Moreover, the children expressed concerns about their ability to adapt their behaviour in order to follow the 'quiet working' rule, and they expressed negative feelings towards how it would feel if this meant they were unable to earn rewards. During the Photograph Interview Isabelle shared concerns that it was 'difficult' to earn stickers, because 'we need to be the quietest table and can't talk'. During a Guided Tour Jack explained that he felt 'sad' because his group did not earn golden time and had to 'work' while another group was allowed to 'play'. During the Final Interview Katie also explained how she felt 'sad' and 'upset', because 'we didn't never have golden time'.

The impact of the group reward system had a particularly profound impact on Katie's transitional experiences. She explained, 'I am getting a bit shy with speaking with Mrs B, I don't speak a lot with her. I'm still a bit shy'. Katie's mum explained that Katie was excited at the anticipation of moving to Year 1, but there was an immediate change from excitement to shyness once the transition occurred. She reported, 'it frightened her in the beginning, this class, the structure, the new teacher, not playing…she went totally silent'. Her mum explained further how Mrs B shared concerns about this shyness during a meeting; she stated, 'when I met Mrs B in November she said, 'well it is just now, last week, that Katie talked to me'.

Although Katie was trying to overcome her shyness and communicate more with her teacher, she was also keen to adhere to the classroom rules. She explained that she was worried about the rules because 'I don't know if I do them correct', but she was excited about the group reward chart, which she explained was because, 'you might win'. She explained further, 'you feel happy' when you earn stickers for your group. The conflicting demands of either speaking more, or earning group rewards for 'being quiet', caused considerable tension for Katie. Furthermore, she reported that it was difficult to earn stickers because 'the tables are all shouting', and whilst she felt she had been quiet, she explained that Mrs B had not noticed, so her efforts had gone unrecognised. This led to her concluding that, 'stickers annoy me sometimes'. In order to earn rewards by conforming to rules, children are required to adapt their behaviour, which Howe (2012) suggests requires a significant amount of effort. This, Howe warns, can lead to negative feelings during periods of transition, however the data in this study provides evidence to explain why this may be the case. Not only were Katie's attempts to conform to the rules going unnoticed, causing her frustration and 'annoyance', the rule was in itself unhelpful for Katie, who was already struggling with shyness and needed to be supported in talking more, rather that being discouraged from communicating.

This data has shown how rules can be deeply problematic for some children during transition from one year group to the next, not just because children may struggle to understand what is expected of them, as Peters (2010) found, but because the rules are in themselves inhibitory. However the data revealed that rewards also had an impact on the children's experiences of transition. Given that the children appeared to be connecting these individual rewards with pedagogical demand, the next section discusses how these rewards influenced this aspect of transition into Year 1.

Rewards and pedagogical demands

The children excitedly reported that they could earn stickers for their individual reward charts for the completion of 'good work'. However, it appeared that the criteria for earning these stickers was somewhat ambiguous. As a result, the children found it difficult to explain what constituted 'good work'. Sean believed that the completion of good sentences was doing good work, and Leanne explained that good work had been achieved when they persisted with a difficult task. This supports Torrance and Pryor's (2001) action research findings that the criteria for achieving success with learning is often not made explicit to children. This claim was further supported by some parents in this study, who identified the reward system as an area of concern in relation to their children's transition experiences. For example, Isabelle's mum reported that she did not think the children 'understood the sort of reward system', going on to state, 'I'm not sure that there's a clear link for the child between what they have to do to get that reward'. These words were echoed by Bobby's mum who stated that during the first few months Bobby 'had difficulty understanding what was expected of him'. Similarly Katie's mum stated that the transition to Maternelle was 'terrible' for Katie, which was linked to the fact 'that the stickers were not good, because…they didn't understand for what they got the sticker'.

Isabelle's mum shared concerns that the lack of clear instructions on how to achieve stickers meant that some children were not filling their sticker charts as quickly as other children. This, she suggested can make children 'feel a little bit inferior', especially if they are 'sensitive'. Bobby's mum agreed that the lack of understanding of how to earn rewards led to negative feelings as Bobby would question 'why did so 'n'

so get a sticker, when I didn't get a sticker and I'm doing my best?' Bobby confirmed his mum's assertion when he selected a 'bored face' to express his feelings towards the sticker chart, explaining 'I'm a bit bored cos I wish there were no sticker charts because it's tiring trying to get stickers'. He then reported that once he had completed his sticker chart he did not actually receive his prize because the teacher forgot to give it to him. In sum, Bobby perceived himself to be working to his full potential but was unsure of what the criteria for success was, given that he had failed to receive rewards when he believed he was being successful.

Although the children reported uncertainty about how to achieve 'good work', they shared an understanding that the quality of their work would be judged by the teacher. Sean and Leanne agreed during a Guided Tour that stickers could be earned for work 'if Mrs B thinks it's good'. Leanne added, during the Photograph Interview, that stickers were awarded 'when Mrs B is very impressed with our work'. The perception that the teacher determined success was again evident during the Playmobil Activity. Leanne (in role as Polly) asked Katie (who was in role as Mrs B), 'can I get a sticker in my agenda?' Bobby (who was observing) commented, 'only if you do good work'. When the researcher then asked 'how would we know if Leanne's work was good?', Katie declared 'I'm Mrs B so I decide'. This data indicates that the children felt that they had little control in the process of achieving success, as the control seemed to be firmly in the teacher's hands.

Given that previous research has shown that a teacher-controlled environment can have a negative impact on motivation, as children can lack autonomy in meeting work expectations (Carlton and Winsler, 1998), these findings show how the use of rewards

can contribute towards this lack of autonomy and subsequent demotivation. This was the case for Bobby who was left feeling frustrated at not knowing how to achieve success. Further analysis of the data revealed other ways in which the reward system was impacting on the children's motivation to learn, which will be discussed within this next section.

The data suggested that the children perceived rewards in Year 1 to be offered in exchange for completing work. However, the children also perceived the work in Year 1 to be generally more difficult than it had been in Maternelle. Maths, in particular, was reported to be difficult. For example, Katie explained, 'I don't like maths because it's difficult to work out the maths', and specified, 'it was more difficult at the start'. Isabelle agreed, explaining 'they (Tom and Polly) might not like maths because you need to, like, take away and its difficult when they first come'. When asked how transition experiences could be improved Katie suggested the maths should be a bit easier when children join Year 1 'because people are just like 5 and 6, so they're still very small to understand and they're too young'. Jack suggested that the maths work 'should be easy first, and then it gets harder and harder'. Sean agreed that some pages in the maths book were 'too hard' at the beginning of the year.

Whilst negative feelings were associated with difficult work, the children expressed positive feelings towards the opportunities for learning in Year 1. Bobby stated that he enjoyed Year 1 work because he 'gets to learn more things'. Isabelle explained how she enjoyed Year 1 work because she could 'get quicker into an adult'. Whilst Katie expressed a preference towards the play-based activities of Maternelle over the work-based activities of Year 1, she concluded, 'but in primary we learn more'.

Bobby then expressed concerns that if there was too much play in Year 1 'we won't learn anything'. These strong learning dispositions, however, were being challenged by the reward system, which was evident in the children's explanation of why they preferred 'easier' tasks.

'Handwriting' was a common response when the children were asked to describe enjoyable Year 1 experiences. Isabelle and Jack explained, during a Guided Tour, that when you had finished your work you could then choose to do another activity; they gave the examples, 'handwriting, reading or maths'. Jack then explained that he would choose handwriting because, 'it's easier'. Sean repeatedly reported that handwriting was an enjoyable activity in Year 1 and explained that when allowed to choose a work activity, he would choose handwriting, explaining, 'cos I like getting stickers'. He then concluded, in the Final Interview, 'I don't really like the thing what you do (handwriting), I like it more because you get the stickers'. He continued to explain that with handwriting, 'it's very easy for you to get a sticker, I want to get a sticker'. Similar sentiments towards the stickers were reported by Leanne when discussing her weekend news book, who explained that this used to be an enjoyable activity for her because she would often earn stickers for this work. However, she concluded that this was no longer an enjoyable activity because, 'it got a little bit harder and harder so I didn't get so much stickers'.

The data represented above illustrates how rewards were found to be inhibiting children from challenging their current learning potential, as the children reported how they would select 'easier' tasks, such as handwriting, in an attempt to earn rewards. The positive learning disposition of 'persisting with difficulty' (Brooker 2008, 09) was therefore negatively impacted by the children's desire to earn rewards. Furthermore, this avoidance of more challenging tasks could be an initial sign of disengagement, which

has also been seen to have negative a negative impact on subsequent transitions (Osborn , McNess, and Pollard, 2006).

Conclusion

While previous research has shown that many children may experience vulnerability during transition (Niesel and Holsted, 2015), or feelings of discouragement and disappointment (Brooker, 2008), this study provides evidence to show why this may be the case, by focusing on the ways in which rules and rewards can impact negatively on young children's transition during their early years. The data presented clearly indicated that while the young children in this study were initially excited and motivated by the reward system in Year 1, it raised a number of tensions and conflicts which had a negative impact on the transition of some children from Maternelle to Year 1. For example, being rewarded for 'being quiet' was problematic on several levels. Firstly, the children's own attempts to 'be quiet' could be thwarted by others, causing frustration and irritation with other class members. However it was also apparent that a reward for 'being quiet' contrasted sharply with the collaborative pedagogical approach employed in Maternelle, which the children were used to. For some children, this caused confusion and distress during their transition into Year 1. In addition, the study revealed that the reward system actively discouraged some children from engaging in more challenging activities in Year 1. Given that the children were very aware that they would be rewarded for producing 'good work', some children opted to complete 'easy' activities, like handwriting, as they believed the end product was more likely to earn them a reward, than if they had tried a more challenging activity.

Together this suggests that reward systems can have a detrimental effect on children's experiences of transition, especially when the 'new' environment has rules

and expectations that are different from those with which the child is familiar. Whilst this does not necessarily suggest that teachers should refrain from using rewards to promote pedagogical expectations, it does indicate that reflection should occur on current use of rewards to understand the aim of such systems, and to determine the effectiveness of them. This strongly supports Mansfield's (2007) assertion that consideration of how rewards are used is more important than debating whether they should be used.

There is a wealth of literature building on the vision of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), that children should be viewed as active participants in their social worlds (Brostrom 2012; Einarsdottir 2005; Vasquez de Velasco 2000). Thornberg (2007) suggests that a step towards achieving this aim is to include children in the process of selecting and designing classroom rules to suit their learning environment. Findings from this present study indicate that children would also benefit from being included in decisions related to the rewards and sanctions used to enforce the chosen rules. This would ensure that the system is clear and meaningful to the children. Mansfield (2007) acknowledges that empirical research is somewhat sparse in relation to how children interpret and respond to classroom variables, such as the use of rewards and sanctions. She argues that further research in this area is essential if we are to improve the quality of learning environments. This present study answers this call, but also demonstrates that understanding children's perceptions of rules, rewards and sanctions is particularly important during crucial times of transition, when changes in learning environments can have an even greater impact on children's engagement with learning.

Indication of figures and tables

References

Birbeck, David, and Murray Drummond. 2007. "Research with Young Children: Contemplating Methods and Ethics." *Journal of Educational Enquiry* 7 (2): 21 – 31. https://libguides.library.curtin.edu.au/referencing/chicago

Britto, Pia. 2012. *School Readiness: A Conceptual Framework*. New York: United Nations Children's Fund. https://www.unicef.org/education/files/Chil2Child_ConceptualFramework_FINAL(1).pdf.

Brooker, Liz. 2008. *Supporting Transitions in the Early Years.* Berkshire: Open University Press.

Brostrom, Stig. 2012. "Children's Participation in Research." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 20 (3): 257 – 269. doi.10.1080/09669760.2012.715407.

Cameron, Judy. 2001. "Negative Effects of Reward on Intrinsic Motivation: A Limited Phenomenon: A Comment on Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (2001)." *Review of Educational Research* 71 (1): 29-42. doi: 10.3102/00346543071001029.

Carlton, Martha, and Adam Winsler. 1998. "Fostering Intrinsic Motivation in Early Childhood Classrooms." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 25 (3): 159 – 166. doi.org/10.3102%2F00346543071001029.

Cassidy, Maria. 2005. "'They Do it Anyway': A Study of Primary 1 Teachers' Perceptions of Children's Transition into Primary Education." *Early Years* 25 (2): 143 – 153. doi: 10.1080/09575140500127923.

Chapparo, Christine and Elizabeth Hooper, E. (2002). When is it work? Perceptions of six-year-old children. *Work*, 19, 291–302.

Clark, Alison, and Peter Moss. 2005. *Spaces to Play: More Listening to Young Children Using the Mosaic Approach.* London: National Children's Bureau.

Clark, Alison, and Peter Moss. 2001. *Listening to Young Children the Mosaic Approach.* London: National Children's Bureau.

Deci, Edward, Richard Koestner, and Richard Ryan. 2001. "Extrinsic Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation in Education: Reconsidered Once Again." *Review of Educational Research* 71 (1): 1-27. https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2001_DeciKoestnerRyan.pdf

Denscombe, Martyn. 2010. *The Good Research Guide for Small-Scale Social Research Projects.* 4th ed. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Einarsdottir, Johanna. 2011. "Icelandic's Children's Early Education Transition Experiences." *Early Education and Development* 22 (5): 737-756. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2011.597027.

Einarsdottir, Johanna. 2005. "Playschool in Pictures: Children's Photographs as a Research Method." *Early Child Development and Care* 175 (6): 523-541. doi: 10.1080/03004430500131320.

Fisher, Julie. 2009. "'We Used to Play in Foundation, it Was More Funner': Investigating Feelings About Transition from Foundation Stage to Year 1." *Early Years* 29 (2): 131 – 145. doi. 10.1080/09575140802672576.

Goodhall, Natasha and Catharine Atkinson. 2019. 'How do children distinguish between 'play' and 'work'? Conclusions from the literature.' *Early Child Development and Care*. 189(10): 1695 – 1708. doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2017.1406484

Holsted, Iona. 2015. *Continuity of Learning*: *Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools.* Wellington: Education Review Office. Crown Copyright. https://www.ero.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/ERO-Continuity-of-Learning-FINAL.pdf

Howe, Sarah. 2012. "Children's Changing Perceptions over the Course of the Transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.*"* PhD diss., University of Roehampton, Roehampton, England. https://core.ac.uk/download/files/97/9822018.pdf

Hughes, Martin, and Andrew Pollard. 2006. "Home-School Knowledge Exchange in Context." *Educational Review* 58 (4): 385 – 395. doi.org/10.1080/00131910600971784.

Kahyaoglu, Hale. (2014). Play as seen by children and pre-school teachers in Turkey. *Procedia–Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 152, 149–153. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.09.172

Kinkead-Clark, Zoyah. 2015. "Ready for big school': making the transition to primary school – a Jamaican perspective." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 23(1): 67-82, doi: 10.1080/09669760.2014.999027

Lam, Mei, and Andrew Pollard. 2006. "A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Children as Agents in the Transition from Home to Kindergarten." *Early Years* 26 (2): 123 – 141. doi.10.1080/09575140600759906.

Loizou, Eleni. 2011. "Empowering Aspects of Transition from Kindergarten to First Grade through Children's Voices." *Early Years* 31 (1): 43-55. doi.10.1080/09575146.2010.515943.

Lundy, Laura, Lesley McEvoy, and Bronagh Byrne. 2011. "Working with Young Children as Co-Researchers: An Approach Informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child." *Early Education and Development* 22 (5): 714 – 736. doi.10.1080/10409289.2011.596463.

Mansfield, Caroline. 2007. "Responding to Rewards and Sanctions: The Impact of Students' Sense of Belonging and School Affect." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Fremantle, November 2007. http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/1597/1/Responding_to_rewards.pdf

Margetts, Kay. 2004. "Identifying and Supporting Behaviours Associated with Co-Operation, Assertion and Self-Control in Young Children Starting School." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 12 (2): 75 – 85. doi.10.1080/13502930485209441.

Margetts, Kay. 2002. "Transition to School – Complexity and Diversity." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 10 (2): 103 – 114. doi.10/1080/13502930285208981.

Medina, Soraya. 2001. "The Participation of Children in Venezuela: Advances and Challenges." *Early Childhood Matters, Bernard Van Leer Foundation* 98: 45 – 49. https://issuu.com/bernardvanleerfoundation/docs/the_convention_on_the_rights_of_the _child_and_youn

Merrett, Frank and Linda Jones. 1994. "Rules, Sanctions and Rewards in Primary Schools." *Education Studies* 20 (3): 345-356. doi.10.1080/0305569940200303.

Niesel, Renate, and Wilfried Griebel. 2007. "Enhancing the Competence of Transition Systems through Co-Construction." In *Informing Transitions in the Early Years,* edited by Aline-Wendy Dunlop and Hilary Fabian, 21-32. Berkshire: Open University Press.

O'Kane, Mary. 2016. *Transition from Preschool to Primary School.* Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. https://www.ncca.ie/media/2471/transition-research-report-no-19.pdf

Osborn, Marilyn, Elizabeth McNess, and Andrew Pollard. 2006. "Identity and Transfer: A New Focus for Home-School Knowledge Exchange." *Educational Review* 58 (4): 415 – 433. doi.org/10.1080/00131910600971867.

Peters, Sally. 2010. *Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School.* Wellington: Ministry of Education. www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications.

Sharp, Caroline, Gabrielle White, Bethan Burge, and Anna Eames. 2006. "Making a Successful Transition to Year 1." *Practical Research for Education* 35, 20 – 27. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/PRE_PDF_Files/06_35_04.pdf

Shreeve, Ann, Dominci Boddington, Brigitte Bernard, Kim Brown, Kristina Clarke, Lesley Dean and Tom Elkins et al. 2002. "Student Perceptions of Rewards and Sanctions." *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 10 (2): 239-256. doi.10.1080/14681360200200142.

Sikes, Patricia. 2004. "Methodology, Procedures and Ethical Concerns." In *Doing Educational Research,* edited by Clive Opie, 15 – 32. London: SAGE.

Skouteris, Helen, Brittany Watson, and Jarrad Lum. 2012. "Preschool Children's Transition to Formal Schooling: The Importance of Collaboration Between Teachers, Parents and Children." *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 37 (4) 78-85. http://mnprek-3.wdfiles.com/local--files/research-studies/Transition%20to%20formal%20schooling%20-%20collaboration.pdf

Thornberg, Robert. 2007. "'It's Not Fair!' – Voicing Pupils' Criticism of School Rules." *Children and Society* 22 (6): 418 – 428. doi.10/1111/j.1099-0860.2007.00121.x.

Torrance, Harry, and John Pryor. 2001. "Developing Formative Assessment in the Classroom: Using Action Research to Explore and Modify Theory.*" British Educational Research Journal* 27 (5): 615-631. doi.org/10.1080/01411920120095780.

UN General Assembly. 1989. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577. https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html

Vasquez de Velasco, Carmen. 2000. "The Voices of Children." *Early Childhood Matters, Bernard Van Leer Foundation* 94: 30 – 34. https://earlychildhoodmatters.online/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ECM094-2000_Listening_to_childrenb.pdf

Wing, Lisa. 1995. Play is not the work of the child: Young children's perceptions of work and play. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 10, 223–247. doi:10.1016/0885-2006(95)90005-5

Yeboah, David. 2002. "Enhancing Transition from Early Childhood Phase to Primary Education: Evidence from the Research Literature." *Early Years* 22 (1): 51-68. doi.10.1080/09575140120111517.

Zhang, Xiao. 2015. "The Differential Role of Symptoms of Anxiety and Social Withdrawal in Chinese Children's Dependency on Their Teachers During the Transition to Nursery" *Care, Early Education and Development*, 26:7, 956-969, doi:10.1080/10409289.2014.915675