‘Why is it important for Early Year’s settings to ensure they have an effective transition policy and procedures in place, and how does the implementation of policies and procedures in Early Years settings impact children’s Personal, Social and Emotional development?’

This study was submitted as a requirement for the award of BA (Honours) Degree in Education
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The research and writing of findings into this fascinating aspect of Early Years Education was sponsored by the eclfoundation.
Abstract
This enquiry investigates the importance for Early Years settings (for 2-5 year olds) to have effective transition policies and procedures in place. The main focus of this study is how, using a variety of methods such as ‘home visits’ and ‘stay and play’ sessions, these policies and procedures promote smooth transitions for young children starting a new early years setting. This study also explores the background literature available to support practitioners responsible for writing and implementing the policies and procedures that directly influence practice in the settings.

Following a collaborative approach with the parents and children, this investigation used a small-scale empirical study to gain the perceptions of parents, practitioners and children and by observing a group of three children settling into a new pre-school. The findings produced in this study highlight the benefits effective transition policies play in the promotion of children’s Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) (DfE a, 2012).

A Footnote
This paper has been edited slightly by ecl, making it shorter and in a style consistent with other documents placed on the ecl website. Whilst actual evidence in the form of appendices have not been included, the actual content and meanings have not been altered from Lily’s original version. We are including it as a piece of research in our library because, although the research sample is small, the issues she is looking at and how she has looked at them using a more systemic lens, contains findings that are of great topical interest to many people beyond those exploring ideas around the home/ school links in the Early Years settings.

Indeed having walked with her during this course of study I think there is so much to learn from the professionals and practitioners who are bringing such a rounded view of the child into the more formalised educational setting of schools. I hope this is just a start of some deeper learning.

Terry Ingham
September 2014
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1. Rationale

This study investigates the topic of transitions because, as an Early Years practitioner I am responsible, along with my team, for settling new children into my setting. In this way we play a vital role in their transition into the nursery and their later transition into school. It is my professional concern to explore and extend my knowledge and understanding of what is included in effective transition policies and procedures and what positive impact these play in promoting young children’s Personal, Social and Emotional development (PSED).

Effective transitions matter. In her guide to ‘Transitions in the Early Years’, Allingham defines “transition as any kind of change that may alter routines that the children, and sometimes the adults, are used to” (2011:3). This can include moving between rooms within a setting, a practitioner leaving or a new practitioner starting. As such children go through a number of transitions during their lives, including a key transition during the process of being at home with parents and family members to attending an Early Years setting.

In September 2012, the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) introduced a framework for learning stating that “practitioners working with the youngest children are expected to focus strongly on the three prime areas,” Personal, Social and Emotional development, Physical development and Communication and Language development as they “are the basis for successful learning in the other four specific areas” (DfE a, 2012:6), Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the World and Expressive arts and Design. This study focuses on the children’s PSED as crucially they need to feel safe and comfortable within their new environment, thereby “helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others; to form positive relationships and develop respect for others; to develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings; to understand appropriate behaviour in groups; and to have confidence in their own abilities” (DfE a, 2012:5).

A recent review carried out by The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services states “transition poses a potential risk to the well-being and progress of children and young people” (2010:34). This review highlights the links between poor educational transitions and lower levels of attainment, less positive attitudes towards learning and even a disengagement from education.

The background literature (Section 3) highlights children’s need to form safe and secure relationships with others before they are able to become confident and capable learners. Recent “findings from early childhood studies and neuroscience have shown that early life experiences are more important than previously thought” (DfE a, 2012). For this reason it is vital...
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For practitioners and professionals working with young children to have in place and fully understand the vital importance of effective transition policies and procedures.

In the majority of Early Years settings, transition policy and procedures provide support to new children in three ways – those starting the setting, children moving within the setting and supporting children during their transition out of the setting and into school. The background literature highlights the importance of supporting children during each of these stages. This study will reflect on many aspects of transitions, however, due to the time limit in which my investigation and empirical nature of the study that was carried out, the key focus is on young children’s transition into a nursery or pre-school.

An empirical study was carried out as the basis of my enquiry and although it was based on a small test group of three children, the findings provided me with sufficiently rich data to critically reflect on the implementation of the transition process within a local pre-school. I then reviewed the data against important theoretical perspectives and the current guidance available through the Government and the Local Authority in Bath and North East Somerset (BANES).

The findings from this investigation highlight the importance of Early Years practitioners providing children with effective transitions and in a way that also emphasises the significance of a collaborative approach with parents. This investigation worked closely with the parents of the children who had a direct involvement in the study but also took into account the other parents at the setting. This illustrates that “the value of the concept of partnership with parents is based on the belief that good working relationships, clear and reciprocal communication and common goals between parents and professionals are crucial to the successful delivery of effective services to children” (Kay, 2008:274).

The findings produced from this study and the critique of background literature available will influence any recommendations or amendments I make that are needed for an effective transition policy and procedure in both my current and any future settings I work in.
2. Focus Group Introduction

This investigation includes a small-scale empirical study that has produced evidence used, along with the background literature, to form the basis of this enquiry. The investigation involved three children who started at a local pre-school in September 2013:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Child A</th>
<th>Child C</th>
<th>Child F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td>3 years 10 months</td>
<td>3 years 5 months</td>
<td>3 years 9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends setting for:</td>
<td>5 afternoons</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>2.5 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends another setting:</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>With a childminder 2 afternoons</td>
<td>After school club 2 evenings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with:</td>
<td>Mum and Dad</td>
<td>Mum, Dad and older sister</td>
<td>Mum, Dad, older brother and sister</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I chose to include these three children because, although they all attend the same pre-school, they each come from different backgrounds:

- Child A had previously remained at home with her mother full time,
- Child C attended a childminding setting 2 days a week,
- Child F attended a previous nursery 2 days a week.

This allowed me to explore if the transition policy and procedures implemented within the setting were meeting the varying needs presented by children and how this was impacting their PSED.
3. Background Literature

“Then overnight your life is transformed, the familiar family exchanged for the strange squadrons of school, the soft furnishings for the hard tables and desks; the day’s seamless rhythm for the metronome of the school timetable. The new system is a shock to the system.” (Smith R, 2011:22)

It is now widely recognised by Early Years practitioners and professionals that during the early years of their lives, children face numerous changes and transitions yet the most striking aspect of this literature review is just how recent much of the mainstream educational thinking is around the topic. Although many of the psychological theories relate back to the 1970’s or even earlier, interventions in Early Years transition have largely occurred only in the past fifteen years.

Detailed research, carried out by the Effective Provision for Pre-school Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al, 2004), highlights the crucial importance of a well-managed early years transition, pointing to its effect on emotional well-being, learning and development as “children’s earliest experiences help to build a secure foundation for learning throughout their school years and beyond” (DCSF, 2008:10). They point to the rise of families which have two working parents as a major factor leading to an increase in the number of children attending Early Years settings.

This investigation highlights the importance for all Early Year’s settings to have effective and holistic transition policies and procedures in place. Firstly, this study explores a little of the nature of the transition and in particular some of the systemic, social and psychological theories that underpin the development of policy and procedure.

Secondly, it surveys some of the practical background literature that provides support to those responsible for creating and implementing policies and procedures with the belief that, “such is the significance of early transitions for young children that it is essential that parents, educators and policy makers pay close attention to their experiences in order to provide well for them” (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007:59). It critiques the range of evidence available in relation to a variety of approaches such as ‘home visits’, ‘stay and play’ sessions and ‘All about me’ forms, all emphasising the importance of working in partnership with parents and linking this view to Bronfenbrenner’s socio-cultural model.

Thirdly, with a focus on the report carried out by Tickell in 2011, Bowlby’s attachment theory and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, this review emphasises how effective these policies and
procedures can be, alongside the important of role the key person, in providing children with essential support to nurture their PSED.

Robert Smith (2011) quoted above, cites ‘starting school’ as the first major cultural milestone a child experiences on a journey of academic and personal development. Even if there has been a use of playgroups and nurseries, the first day at school marks a move away from being the little person who is looked after in the soft, intimate environment of home. This natural social system of family has a competitor, the social construct of schooling with all that implies. A child having to see themselves, he suggests, as others see them requires a split in their self-identity. Being ‘grouped, managed and observed’, there is a loss of privacy, becoming one of many, with a need to respect the authority of the teacher, all represent a first major transition into society; the first amongst many. Smith’s is a systemic perspective that highlights the impact of social and cultural factors on the development of the individual.

Bronfenbrenner explores this systemic perspective further using a socio-cultural model of development. It has been a “very influential idea in shaping how people theorise and explain the social context of children’s lives” (McDowall Clark, 2010:12). The model places the child at the centre of a number of different human systems, with their social, cultural, economic and political factors and demonstrates succinctly their impact on human development. It highlights how the people children meet and the experiences they face shape and influence their development during their childhood and throughout their lives. Bronfenbrenner’s sociocultural model of development (adapted from Murphy, 2008) is shown below:
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The first layer of this model is the microsystem which focuses on the “context in which the child’s earliest experiences take place” (McDowall Clark, 2010:12). This includes their immediate family, any religious faiths that their family may follow and any Early Year’s settings the child may attend.

In practical terms, many settings use ‘All about me’ questionnaires to provide them with written information about each child’s family, background and any other settings they may attend. This tool allows them to provide children with a sense of familiarity and continuity during transitions. It emphasises the view to practitioners that “all children are unique because of their family, racial or cultural heritage, life experiences, individual characteristics and abilities” (Bristol City Council, 2009:92).

The ‘All about me’ forms identify children’s “unique complexities, including their vulnerability, resilience, innate strengths and interests, these can be used as starting points for learning, development and enjoyment” (Bristol City Council, 2009:30). They can be shared with other practitioners within the setting, including new members who join the team at a later date to ensure the children’s identity and self-esteem are celebrated and respected, as both are “key to the successful promotion of young children’s positive sense of inclusivity and belonging in their early year’s settings” (Nutbrown, 2009:1).

The mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner’s model explores the “interaction and communication between the child’s various microsystems” (McDowall Clark, 2010:13). The transition policies and procedures vary across each Early Years setting, however, along with many others, the setting included in the empirical study visits each child at home as part of their settling in process. Bronfenbrenner “emphasises the importance of the mesosystem and of good partnership between the various parties to support the child’s transitions between these” (McDowall Clark, 2010:13). ‘Home visits’ allow children and parents to meet and form a relationship with practitioners in a familiar, secure environment. This is an essential aspect of the children’s transition process as “parents and the home environment they create are the single most important factor in shaping children’s well-being, achievements and prospects” (DfE, 2007:1).

‘Home visits’ also provide parents with an opportunity to interact and communicate their views on their child’s learning and development, share their children’s current interests or express any issue and concerns they may have with a practitioner. The National Assessment Agency (2008) states that “home visits are a key tool in building trusting relationships between the practitioner,
child and family.” Many families and practitioners find home visits immensely beneficial as they provide the underpinning links between home and the setting.

‘Stay and play’ and ‘Settling in’ sessions are both also used within many Early Years settings as part of effective transition procedures. These sessions encourage the children to explore and become accustomed with their new environment and also “learn how to adjust to the local code in the setting they enter and learn successful ways to relate to others there” (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007:33) alongside their parent or other familiar adult. Parents are encouraged to stay during these sessions for “the time it takes for their child to feel confident in the transition” (Underdown, 2007:42). Roberts (2006) supports this view, stating “familiar people, things, places and routines become even more important than usual” the more these aspects of a child’s life are maintained through “periods of transitions, the better” (2006:135).

The exosystem is the “wider environment within which micro- and meso-systems exist. This is the local context or community which will impact on the child’s experience” (McDowall Clark, 2010:13). BANES Local Authority provides Early Years settings with support on transitions, including the ‘Moving On’ document (BANES, 2013) that is provided to all settings in the local area, including the pre-school involved in my study. The local Family Information Service provides “a free and comprehensive information service for all families, professionals and young people in the Bath and North East Somerset area” (BANES, 2013). This service offers information and advice on a range of Early Year’s services including advice for children who may require additional support during transitions.

The final layer of Bronfenbrenner’s socio-cultural model is the macrosystem, this layer focuses on the “wider political and ideological beliefs, social values and customs” (McDowall Clark, 2010:13) that can influence children’s lives. Research such as the findings produced by the EPPE project (2004) highlighted the “significance of transitions in children’s well-being and development” (Palaiologou and Hallowes, 2010:96). The importance of supporting children’s emotional wellbeing and involving parents throughout the transition process is now nationally acknowledged and is recognised throughout the EYFS and national strategies such as the ‘Inclusion Development Programme’ (DCSF, 2010) and the ‘Social and Emotional Aspects of Development’ (SEAL) (DCSF, 2009).

The importance of effective transition policies and procedures in Early Years has been acknowledged at a national level through the EYFS curriculum and national strategies due to the vital role the ‘settling in’ process plays in children’s PSED and future learning, promoting the view that “children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure” (DfE a, 2012).
Interestingly Early Years practice draws heavily on more mainstream psychology rather than educational theory as such.

Critical to the development of policy was Tickell’s independent review carried out in 2011. ‘The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning’ introduced the concept of the three prime areas of learning as the “essential foundations for healthy development, for positive attitudes to relationships and learning” (2011:20). Tickell refers to the prime areas as “fundamental to children’s experiences in the specific areas” (2011:95), focusing on a holistic approach towards child development, combining “care, well-being and learning” (Smith H, 2011:15) promoted throughout the ‘Literature Review’ which states each area of learning should be viewed as “complementary and interconnected” (Evangelou et al, 2009:14). Following a holistic approach is essential for the implementation of an effective transition policy as it ensures that practitioners and settings recognise “each child’s context, taking account of their family circumstances, and the community and the culture they come from, as well as their individual personality” (Smith H, 2011:15).

It is Tickell’s belief that young children’s PSED is the “central impact on later wellbeing, learning, achievement and economic circumstances” (2011:93). In her report she discusses the research carried out by Gopnik et al (1999) into the ways in which babies and young children think. The study produced findings that highlight the importance of quality interactions between children and their carers, linking with the view that “children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships” (DfE a, 2012) within the theme of “Positive Relationships” in the current EYFS.

It is important for adults to ensure they are “consistently responsive and sensitive to their physical and emotional needs” (cited in Tickell, 2011:93), especially during times of transitions, to boost children’s self-esteem and sense of positive wellbeing. The document “Supporting Families in the Foundation Years” (DfE b, 2012) provides Early Years practitioners with support in providing children with secure positive relationships as they are “significantly linked to children and young people’s learning and educational attainment, social skills, self-efficacy and self-worth, behaviour, and mental and physical health” (DfE b, 2012).

Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ (1968) also supports a holistic approach to promote learning. His model points to several levels of need a person needs to attend to in order to progress through to the highest level of self-actualisation. Maslow believed that everyone has the motivation to achieve each of these needs, however “unfortunately, progress is often disrupted by failure to meet lower level needs” (McLeod, 2007).
Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ (adapted by McLeod, 2007):

This model considers the implications of children’s PSED within an effective transition policy as it highlights the need for “safety and security”, “love and belonging” and the promotion of children’s “self-esteem”. Transitions must meet a child’s “need to feel emotionally and physically safe and accepted within the classroom to progress and reach their full potential” (McLeod, 2007).

In the 1950’s Bowlby first “identified the crucial role that a loving attachment between an infant and his or her mother played in the foundation of mental health” (Underdown, 2007:41). In 1969, he conducted a study on a group of juvenile thieves and found that 14 out of the 17 had suffered maternal deprivation and felt no guilt towards their victims. As discussed by Underdown, this led Bowlby to believe that the mental health in infants who do not receive “warmth, sensitivity, responsiveness and dependability” (2007:42) through a secure attachment may become impaired. Therefore, when babies and young children are able to form secure attachments and their needs are addressed and fulfilled by a significant adult, their sense of
emotional wellbeing is promoted through gaining “a sense of belonging, or reassurance that the world is safe” (2007:42).

After the Second World War, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education encouraged the view that “the right policy to pursue would be positively to discourage mothers of children under two from going back to work” (1945:1) as this would be in the best interests of their child’s health and development. Bowlby’s theory of attachment and his findings that, from birth, babies seek to form attachments with their mother or other primary carer was criticised for its timely links to the political push to encourage women to return to caring for children in the home, allowing the men returning home from fighting in the Second World War to re-enter the workplace.

However, further research carried out by Schaffer and Emerson (1964) produced findings that supported Bowlby’s theory of attachment, although it was their belief that a child’s initial attachment need not always be with their mother, so long as they can develop a loving relationship with someone who is reliable and consistent. The research carried out by Ainsworth et al (1978) also reinforced Bowlby’s view that children “who are securely attached develop the concept of their main caregiver as a ‘secure base’ who is available when needed” (Underdown, 2007:43).

Each of these theories of attachment features strongly in this literature review because babies and young children’s need for secure attachment links strongly with the topic of transitions. Practitioners who are warm and responsive to the children’s needs during a transition process will promote “their all-round learning, behaviour and development” (Nutbrown, 2013). Children who are able to form a secure attachment with a practitioner during a period of transition are able to develop their Personal, Social and Emotional skills and will gain more from the learning opportunities available during their time at a setting as “closeness and emotional wellbeing is good for young developing brains” (Nutbrown, 2013).

The modern version of attachment theory advocates that “young children have the capacity to be strongly attached to more than one person but it is the consistency and quality of the relationships that is most important” (Bristol City Council, 2009:24). In 2003 Elfer et al carried out research into the role of the key person in Early Years settings. Although their findings were very respectful of the parent/child relationship, they emphasised the benefits a close relationship with a professional carer can provide towards children’s learning and development, stating “some aspects of the optimal parental relationships need to be replicated in nurseries” (2003:5).
The Department for Children, Schools and Families define a key person as being responsible for providing a small group of children, often referred to as their ‘key family’ with “consistent care and emotional support and building relationships with their mother, fathers and carers” (2010:5).

Transitions can cause many children and their families a great deal of distress or flag up existing issues or concerns that need to be addressed. Selleck expands on this view, discussing the role the key person plays in responding to a “child at times of stress or challenge – for example, separation from home attachment figures” (2008:2). Therefore when considering effective transition policies, every key person must be aware of the emotional needs of both children and their families.

The positive impact effective transitions in the Early Years are having on children’s learning and development are now recognised throughout the English education system. Research carried out by Ainscow and Humphrey (2006) produced findings that emphasise that “having an identified person whose role it is to build positive, empathetic relationships with a group of children and their parents during Year 6/7 transitions can have a powerful influence on whether pupils are well motivated or disaffected in Years 8 and 9” (Smith H, 2011:17).

The longitudinal study in to the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (2004) has continued to observe the progress of children within the project. In 2012 the ‘Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project’ (EPPSE 3-14) reported findings that “students who had a positive transition from primary to secondary schools had higher attainment and better progress across KS3” and that “students made more academic progress across KS3 where they reported having positive ‘teacher support’, and felt they were valued and respected by teachers” (Sylva et al, 2012). These findings, supported by the research into this area, emphasise the need for schools and teacher to acknowledge the important role transitions play in children’s learning and development, not only in the early years but also throughout their school life.

In conclusion, the background literature emphasises the positive impact an effective transition policy and procedure play in the PSED for the increasing number of children attending Early Years settings. Bronfenbrenner’s ‘sociocultural model of development’ highlights how the use of a variety of techniques such as ‘All about me’ forms and ‘Stay and Play’ sessions promote a holistic approach towards transitions, providing children and their families with support during periods of transitions. Bowlby’s theory of attachment and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs both express the vital need for children to be able extend their PSED so they can engage fully in the
“three prime areas of learning” (Tickell 2012). This ensures children have the skills required to build the secure foundations for future learning and development.

There is a variety of guidance available to Early Years practitioners through their local authorities, in this particular case of BANES, and at a national level through the Department for Education. The key sources and documents promote the same view, encouraging settings to assign each child a ‘key person’ who is consistently supportive, responsive and welcoming to all children.

Indeed the research carried out by Elfer et al (2003) into the benefits of children forming a close relationship with a professional career and a more personalised approach to curriculum development and implementation has now been recognised in relation to a sense of well-being impacting on effective learning, so much so that the successes within the Early Years are now informing practice elsewhere in the education system.
4. Methodology

Alongside this investigation of literature, I have also carried out a small empirical study that followed a group of children during each of their transitions into pre-school. The majority of the data I obtained was collected through qualitative research methods including parental questionnaires, interviews and observations. The study also produced quantitative findings, using tally charts to present the data collected from the parental questionnaires on the parent’s view of the effectiveness of the settling in process.

This section of the investigation addresses the ethical issues that arose during the research process, the methods used to collect the data and explore the validity of the findings collected and used to analyse, ‘why is it important for Early Year’s settings to ensure they have an effective transition policy and procedures in place, and how the implementation of policies, procedures within an Early Years setting impacts children’s Personal, Social and Emotional development (DfE, 2012).

Ethical Issues

Before I was able to begin carrying out my study, a number of ethical issues were taken into consideration. As outlined in my ‘Ethics Approval Form’ (appendix 1 – not included) in order that the “research project should be an ethical process at every stage” (Willan, 2007:184). It was signed by my dissertation tutor to ensure I was “honest, reliable and communicate all aspects of the research process to all the participants” (Roberts-Holmes, 2011:48) throughout the investigation. The word ethics comes from the Greek ‘ethos’ meaning habit or custom, they are a central aspect of all research because as Gallagher discusses, “at their simplest, ethics are principles of right and wrong conduct” (2009:12). Ethical research encourages researchers to follow safe and fair practices that provide a valuable contribution to society.

Firstly, I asked for written, informed voluntary consent from the parents of each child involved in my study (appendices 2-4) and both the practitioners and manager of the pre-school (appendices 5-7not included for reasons of anonymity) because “informed consent of the subject, as the Nuremberg code stressed, is the key to ethical research” (Coady, 2010:74). Each participant was made aware in the permission form that they could withdraw their consent at any point of the investigation. Once signed, I placed the permission forms in a sealed envelope to guarantee the names remain confidential.

I requested permission from the parents of the children involved in the study as the children themselves were unable to give legal consent to their participation. Although the children were
unable to give consent, to confirm their voice was heard and valued I asked them to assent to participating in the investigation (appendices 8-10 not included for anonymity) before observing them, as “children are reliable sources who give valuable information if the right methods are used” (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007:59). If at any point a child became distressed during an observation, I stopped immediately and continued at a different time because “the best interests of the child must be a top priority in all things that affect children” (UNICEF, 1989) and the well-being the children remained my main priority for the duration of gathering evidence for my study.

To protect the participants from any potential harm during the research process, as assured in the permission forms provided to each participant (appendix 2 not included), I ensured all confidential evidence and findings produced during this study was stored securely, only used for its intended purpose and all data deleted by the date specified to the participants, once it had fulfilled their proposed purpose. In line with the guidance to Research and Ethics (non-clinical) at Bath Spa University stating “data should be coded and stored in a manner that does not allow direct recognition of individuals within the data set(s) by anyone other than the researcher or research team” (Bath Spa University Research Committee, 2002). To maintain the anonymity of the children involved in the study I refer to them throughout, using only the first initial instead of their name e.g. child A and ensured the names of any settings they attend were not mentioned at any point of the investigation.

Methods

Once I had addressed each ethical issue associated with my empirical study, I used a variety of research methods to collect my data. The first method I used was a parental questionnaire (appendix 11 not included), to gain an understanding of the parent’s views of their child’s transition process into the pre-school and whether they believed that the policy and procedure in place, supported their child’s Personal, Social and Emotional development and wellbeing. I originally intended to ask the parents of the children within my small-scale study to complete the questionnaires, however when composing the questions I decided it would be beneficial to gain a broader understanding of parental views by asking every parent at the setting to share their views and opinions.

Questionnaires are “a means of gathering data from research subjects by using written questions, which should be unbiased, focused and carefully chosen” (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2008:455). Questionnaire can be difficult to write because the questions can reflect a researcher’s bias or assumptions. Therefore I ran through the questions with my dissertation tutor before I handed them out to parents. She recommended I edit the questions to become
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more open ended consequently allowing me to gain fuller answers and appropriate information from parents.

As an Early Years practitioner, I have a close relationship with the parents at my own setting and I was aware parents may have felt unable to give honest answers, especially if they had a critical response to a question asked. Willan suggests “a too cosy or too hostile relationship” between the parents and the researcher can lead to “data corruption” (2007:192). For this reason I carried out my small-scale study at the local pre-school, where I made participants aware that I was a student and a fellow parent (appendix 1). Using questionnaires allowed the data to be collected anonymously, also encouraging participants to feel empowered and potentially give more truthful answers.

Interviews “attempt to understand the world from the subject’s point of view” and to “unfold meaning of their experiences” (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009:1). Through the use of purposeful, open-ended questions (appendices 21-23 not included for brevity and confidentiality), I gained an understanding from Early Years practitioners from three different settings, including those within the pre-schools included in my study of their views of effective transition policies and procedures and the impact they have on children’s PSED.

MacLeod-Brudenell state, interviews can be structured “using a prescribed list of questions” (2008:455) or unstructured, the method I used to collect my findings, they are “more loosely conducted interviews where you allow the person you are interviewing to extend their thoughts as they wish” (2008:455). As Kvale and Brinkman discuss “research interviews are not a conversation between equal partners” (2009:3) as the researcher has control over the situation. For this reason, during the interviews with practitioners I was respectful of their rights and encouraged them to feel comfortable and empowered, supporting them to provide more in-depth, truthful responses to the questions.

Observations are a useful research methods used “for eliciting data” and “finding out information” (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2008:455). There are numerous observations methods available to researchers such as narrative, EEL, photographs, tracking and learning stories. Each can be used as useful tools to evaluate whether practices and resources are being used efficiently and reflect on their effectiveness. They can also be carried out in a variety of ways including; participatory or non-participatory, structured or non-structured, therefore allowing me to choose the most efficient methods for this study and observe children in their environments with ‘wide eyes and open minds’. As discussed by Barber and Paul-Smith “to gain a truly holistic view of the child you will need to plan when to carry out some observations, some can
be random to give a view of what the child accesses and enjoys but others may need to be planned activities to observe certain skills” (2010:13).

I was conscious whilst carrying out my observations on the children that they may act differently as “the presence of outsiders as observers may be intimidating” (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2008:472). I am a parent of a child at the pre-school and unfamiliar to the children included in my study. I therefore followed a non-participant role during the observations so as to ensure the children did not find my presence daunting. Taking this role also reduced the potential risk of missing information whilst participating in, recording and observing at the same time.

The two observation methods included in this study are learning stories and EEL observations. Learning stories were pioneered by Margaret Carr, one of the creators of Te Whariki, the national curriculum in New Zealand. This format provides positive opportunities for assessing children’s progress in becoming “confident and competent learners and communicators, and on learning strategies and dispositions” (Smith A, 2011:154). Learning stories have been integrated into many Early Years settings across the UK with practitioners using them to record significant moments within each child’s daily routine. Learning stories avoid the emphasis on assessing children or a certain skill and instead look for “finding something of interest, being involved, engaging with challenge, persisting when there are difficulties, expressing a point of view and taking responsibility” (Smith A, 2011:154).

The learning stories used in this study have been adapted in line with the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Scheme) curriculum including the characteristic of effective learning and each of the seven areas of learning (appendix 12-17). These columns clearly show which area of learning a child is exploring and extending in, this allowed me to both highlight their PSED but also show how through an effective transition into the pre-school, the children are now comfortable within the learning environment, confidently building relationships and learning new skills. Learning stories also promote opportunities for dialogue and discussion between parents and practitioners, reflecting on what adult support was provided during the observation and what next steps would extend the child’s learning.

I also included EEL observations to gather evidence for my empirical study (appendices 18-20). This method of observation was introduced by Professor Laevers (1999) who carried out ‘The Project Experimental Education’ an investigation into how they could improve on outcomes for children focussing on “two dimensions: the degree of emotional well-being and the level of involvement” (Laevers, 1999) through the critical reflection of his own and twelve Flemish pre-school teacher’s practice. Laevers concluded that children are able to form strong feelings of
satisfaction and higher levels of concentration and learning during activities where they are engaged, involved and motivated.

He created the ‘Leuven scales for involvement’ that can be used to measure whether pupils are operating to their full capabilities based on “whether the child is focused, engaged and interested in various activities” (Lewis, 2011). Laevers research acknowledged that children’s emotional needs and well-being must be met before they are able to engage in their learning. Therefore, for this study, I have used the ‘scales of involvement’ when carrying out the EEL observations to gauge children’s levels of engagement. This allowed me to make an informed decision on the progression of each child’s PSED and the implications it has on their learning.

Validation of findings
The methods used to conduct this small-scale study have produced qualitative data, as like most Early Years research projects it focuses on a holistic human experience and the collection of non-numerical data through the interaction between the researcher and participant, “this approach seeks to understand a particular context or a situation, a variety of methods are used in order to provide a broad and rich picture” (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2008:457). Qualitative methods give participants a voice that is valued and shared through the communication of their opinions and ideas. This provides researchers with the advantage of gaining insightful comprehension that would not be possible using quantitative methods.

As my study was conducted on a small-scale qualitative research methods also carried greater validity, avoiding the potential risks in using quantitative methods which are more appropriate when there is a need to collect statistical data that can be “analysed and the results may provide a broad snapshot of the issue” (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2008:456), as Willan suggests, “reducing data into a quantitative form may not be the most appropriate for a small-scale study - there is a danger of generalising from small numbers” (2007:188).

A central issue in qualitative research is trustworthiness with large-scale research such as the EPPE projects having “the potential to impact on policy directions and how governments respond to emerging social issues” (Rolfe and Mac Naughton, 2001:04). This research was intended to provide initial insight into policies and procedures for working with Early Years transitions and is not seeking at this stage to be making claims on a more national scale. So in discussing both my awareness of limitations to this research and pointing to rigour within the very real constraints of time, money and access to wider settings, I can say I aim for it to be a trustworthy piece of research within the limitations of the context.
Lincoln and Guba (1985) constructed criteria for researchers to add rigour and validation to qualitative findings through analysing the findings against four key challenges of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

1. Credibility
Whilst conducting my study I strived to “arrive at an accurate and ‘truthful’ outcome to the research” (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2008:455). To add credibility to my findings I used a variety of qualitative research methods, this process is known as triangulation, the use of “combining and comparing different forms of research method and/or different sources of information to arrive at a fuller understanding of an event” (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2008:455).

2. Transferability
The study was carried out on a very small scale, observing only three children, and consequently has a number of limitations. The participants are from one setting in the same area of the country; therefore the findings may not resemble outcomes on a broader scale. However, the findings produced from the study are accurate and are reinforced by the literature review which has been conducted with a wide spread of national sources.

3. Dependability
The timescale in which this study had to be completed was relatively short due to the constraint of the submission date. For this reason the evidence included in the study has been collected over the course of three months. Through further discussion during interviews with the practitioners at the pre-school and personal practice, I believe should this investigation be carried out again, the findings produced would be similar as they are consistent with the children’s experiences of effective transition experiences from previous years.

4. Confirmability
Many critics are “reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research” (Shenton, 2004) because of its “reliability depends on the integrity of the researcher to honestly represent the ideas that form the core of the data collected” (Willan, 2007:188). Robert-Holmes discusses how “a range of perspectives and ideas from different people makes the research more convincing” (2011:191). This study includes a range of perceptions by involving the practitioners and parents at the pre-school. Triangulation also supports the validation of the confirmability of the findings produced during my investigation.
The qualitative approach is commonly used to collect data and evidence when carrying out Early Years research as it provides a more holistic view and guarantees the voice of each participant is heard and respected through interaction with the researcher. The small-scale study included in this investigation has also taken the qualitative approach, using a triangulation of methods to collect an add validity to its findings. This study has ensured its findings are as trustworthy as possible, despite being carried out on a small-scale, within a short period of time. Following the criteria produced by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the findings are creditable, transferable, durable and confirmable. A number of ethical issues were acknowledged and addressed both before and throughout the study to ensure each participant felt empowered and was protected from any potential harm.
5. Findings

In the questionnaire (appendix 11), parents were asked how easily their children separated from them before and after their transition into the pre-school.

Figure 1

Parental view of their child's separation anxiety:

- Improved
- Stayed the same
- Regressed

The questionnaire (appendix 11) also asked how effective parents found three techniques of the transition procedure – ‘home visits’, ‘stay and play’ sessions and the ‘staggered starts’.

Figure 2.1

Staggered Starts

Total number of each score given by parents

Score rating of effectiveness
Figure 2.2

Home Visits

Figure 2.3

Stay and Play Sessions
Figure 3 summarises the findings collected using Learning Stories (appendix 12-17), it highlights where it is evident the children’s personal, social and emotional skills have been developed.

**Figure 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal, Social and Emotional Development:</th>
<th>Child A</th>
<th>Child C</th>
<th>Child F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highlights child A’s confidence to play both independently and join in with others. Child A is aware of the feelings of others when caring for the sick teddy. She enjoys participating in new and challenging activities as has clearly formed close relationships with other children and the practitioners.</td>
<td>Illustrates child C’s confidence in expressing his own ideas and preferences “this is for batman”. He enjoys being involved in and extending play with small groups of children. Child C has also formed relationships with the practitioners and enjoys interacting and communicating with them.</td>
<td>Expresses child F’s enjoyment of forming new relationships and spending time with familiar people. She confidently includes other children in her play “let’s have a picnic” and knows to seek help and advice from practitioners when she requires help with an aspect of self-care, explaining to a practitioner - “I’m cold”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning in other areas</td>
<td>Child A is able to communicate clearly with others, she enjoys being imaginative and is beginning to show an interest in shapes and spaces.</td>
<td>Child C has developed both his gross and fine motor skills and is able to move and handle things in a variety of ways. He enjoys imaginative play and exploring shapes and numbers.</td>
<td>Child F displays a strong interest in singing, dancing and exploring musical instruments, such as the drums. She is able to make her own decisions on ways to carry out role play activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.1 and 4.2 summarise the findings collected using EEL observations (appendix 18-20), highlighting where it is evident the children’s personal, social and emotional skills have been developed and also recorded the children’s levels of involvement in various activities.

**Figure 4.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal, Social and Emotional Development:</th>
<th>Child A</th>
<th>Child C</th>
<th>Child F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child A is confident at extending play alongside her peers and enjoys joining in with group activities. She is also very attentive towards other children, finding and returning their special toys and teddies.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Child C enjoys playing in small groups and making relationships with a number of children. He is considerate and caring of others, apologising for disrupting a game and making people feel better during role play.</td>
<td>Child F has developed a number of social skills and enjoys spending time with others. She is becoming increasingly confident in her own abilities during both periods of free play and together time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning in other areas:</th>
<th>Child A</th>
<th>Child C</th>
<th>Child F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child A enjoys singing and exploring various role play experiences.</td>
<td>Child C confidently communicates with adults and children; he is also able to follow instructions.</td>
<td>Child F enjoys imaginative play in the role play car, the puppet shows and caring for the doll.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The practitioner interviews (appendix 21-23) allowed me to collect information on the procedures implemented during the transition process within each of the three settings.

**Figure 5.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Setting One</th>
<th>Setting Two</th>
<th>Setting Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Visits</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay and Play Sessions</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staggered Starts</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All About Me Forms</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the interviews I asked the same six questions to the practitioners at each of the three different settings and summarised the answers below.

**Figure 5.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>Summary of answers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think having an effective transition policy and procedure in place in your setting is important?</td>
<td>Effective transition policies and procedures provide children and their families with equal and consistent treatment. Children and parents are given information and the opportunity to become familiar with the setting and the staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a practitioner what do you gain from: Home Visits, Stay and Play sessions, Staggered Starts and All About Me Forms.</td>
<td>Each of these transition procedures provides practitioners with relevant information about each child and their family background. They promote a relationship between children and practitioners and a partnership with parents to be formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are children encouraged to form relationships with staff?</td>
<td>Each setting use free play sessions and small group activities to get to know, and form relationships with the children. Staff use the initial information gathered during the procedures discussed on each child’s current interests and background to engage with the children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are children encouraged to form relationships with their peers?</td>
<td>Children are encouraged to form and extend relationships throughout the daily routine at all three settings including meal and snack times. Small group or circle times are also used to encourage relationships to be formed and strengthened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think there are any changes or improvements that could be made to your current transition policy and procedure?</td>
<td>When implemented properly the transition policy and procedure in each setting was effective with children settling in well. Setting one acknowledged the importance of remaining flexible as each child is different. Setting two has received positive feedback from parents. Setting three plans to extend their transition policy by running fortnightly stay and play sessions to promote relationship between staff, children and parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you view the key person approach?</td>
<td>All three settings implemented the key person approach as it provides children with a secure attachment and their families a consistent point of call. The key person approach also ensures children’s interests and stages of development are observed through the use of learning journals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Analysis of Findings

The purpose of this enquiry is to investigate the importance of Early Years settings having an effective transition policy and procedures in place and the impact they have on children’s PSDE. A number of key readings in the literature review, such as the EPPE project (2004) and Dunlop and Fabian (2007), alongside my empirical study, emphasise the need for a well-managed, holistic early year’s transition to support children’s emotional wellbeing, especially with the increase in two working parent families.

The first part of the analysis explores various aspects and procedures needed in an effective transition policy and compares theory with my findings into the practice of implementing a transition policy and procedures within a local pre-school. Bronfenbrenner’s socio-cultural model of development highlights the systemic, environmental factors that influence children’s development and stresses the importance of “good partnership between the various parties to support the child’s transitions” (McDowall Clark, 2010:13).

Secondly this analysis highlights why it is important for an Early Years setting to have an effective transition policy and procedure in place and, when implemented correctly, the positive impact they have on children’s PSED and future learning.

Many Early Years settings, including two of the settings interviewed (figure 5.1), use ‘home visits’ as an effective method of gaining information about the child and family and to develop an awareness of the child’s interests and stage of development. The findings produced from the parental questionnaire show the majority of parents found the home visit experience useful (figure 2.1), rating them with the highest scores of 4 or 5. The interviews with practitioners indicate they shared a positive view of home visits (figure 5.2), seeing them as opportunities to meet the children for the first time in a familiar environment and for parents to share information confidentially (appendix 21-23). The National Assessment Agency (2008) supports this view that home visits are a key tool for settings to develop an initial relationship and forming the underpinning links between the family and the setting.

Findings from the parental questionnaire (figure 2.2) and practitioner interviews (figure 5.2) also show that stay and play sessions are valued as part of an effective transition policy by both parents and practitioners promote. A number of Early Years settings including all three settings involved in my study (figure 5.1) invite families to attend ‘Stay and Play’ sessions, as Dunlop
and Fabian (2007) discuss, they encourage children to explore and become confident in their new environment with the security of a parent or career.

The data collected from the parental questionnaires produced conflicting views on the effectiveness of ‘staggered starts’ (figure 2.3). One parent states “I thought the length of the settling in period was excellent” (appendix 11.4) however other parents express more negative experiences of the staggered starts, with one child “becoming unsettled by the continuous change to her routine” (appendix 11.2) and a working parent’s pressure to balance the staggered starts with her need for childcare (appendix 11.1). Despite the contrasting results produced by the questionnaires, ‘staggered starts’ are used at two of the settings involved in the investigation (figure 5.1). One practitioner discusses the benefits of ‘staggered starts’ during her interview (13/02/2014), it is her belief they provide practitioners with an opportunity “to get to know the children in smaller groups” and also allow children to “explore and get use to the environment and routine without it getting too busy” (appendix 21).

The Bristol Standards emphasise the importance of recognising all children as unique individuals with “innate strengths and interests” (2009:92). ‘All about me’ forms are also used in all three settings as part of an effective transition policy (figure 5.1), alongside documents such as ‘Moving On’ provided by the BANES Local Authority, they provide written information about the child’s family and background, current interests and their daily routine. The information is then shared with all current and future members of the team, allowing practitioners to provide children with a sense of familiarity and continuity during periods of transitions.

During the interviews with the practitioners (figure 5.2) each setting felt their transition policies and procedures in place were effective, implemented appropriately and current practice promoted children’s PSED. Practitioners noted that the children were happy within their setting and also received positive feedback from parents.

This view is supported by the data produced from the parental questionnaire carried out at the main pre-school within this study. Figure 1 show that 88% of parents believed that their children’s levels of separation anxiety either improved or stayed the same. In a number of cases where the levels remained the same, children attended another setting. Two of the sixteen parents believe their children regressed slightly during their initial transition into the pre-school, although one questionnaire may have produced flawed data as there is a marked discrepancy between the rating given and the qualitative data she provided as the parent continues to say their child has settled “really well” and that they are “always happy to go” (appendix 11.4). The second parent discusses their child’s initial concerns with “his exposure to new people” and felt
providing children with more opportunities for ‘stay and play’ would “help with familiarisation” however they also continue to express that their child has now settled in “well” (appendix 11.7).

It is vital for all Early Years settings to have an effective transition policy and procedure in place to support children’s PSED. In Tickell’s report ‘The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning’ (2011) she believes PSED carries a “central impact for later wellbeing, learning achievement and economic circumstances” and is now recognised as a prime area of learning. Tickell, like others including Bowlby (1969), Ainsworth (1978) and Nutbrown (2013), recognise the need of adults to ensure they are consistently responsive to the physical and emotional needs of children providing a secure relationship through an attachment figure.

Early Years settings, including the three in this study, implement the ‘Key Person’ approach as this approach “provides children with a secure attachment and their families a consistent point of call” (figure 5.2). Research carried out by Elfer (2003) backs this view, emphasising the role a child’s key person plays in meeting the personal, social and emotional needs of the child. Selleck (2008) stresses the importance of the key person particularly during “times of stress or challenge” such as transitions.

The various observations carried out on the children in my focus group (figure 3 and 4.1) clearly demonstrate a positive impact on their PSED. All three children are progressing well towards the early learning goals outlined in the EYFS such as “forming good relationships with adults and peers”, “select and use activities and resources independently” and “be confident to try new activities, initiate ideas and speak in a familiar group” (DfE a, 2012:12). The observations also highlight that now the children have settled into their new environment they are confidently developing their physical and communication skills and showing high levels of involvement (figure 4.2) in their learning and development of the “specific areas” (DfE a, 2012).

Early Years settings use periods of free play, meal and snack times and adult-led activities such as “together time” to support children’s PSED throughout the daily routine (figure 5.2). However effective transitions play a clear role in children’s PSED as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs emphasises, children need to feel safe, a sense of belonging and high levels of self-esteem before they can progress and achieve their full learning potential. The review carried out by The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services also support the need for effective transition policy and procedures, highlighting the links between poor educational transitions and the impacts of lower levels of attainment and children’s disengagement from education.
The findings from this investigation raise a number of the key messages on the topic of Early Years transitions. From this I suggest the following three recommendations to share with the participants and settings involved in this study:

1. The role of the adult is a key aspect in the implementation of an effective Early Years transition policy and procedure.

   Early Years practitioners and professionals should be encouraged to genuinely reflect on their current practice through support and continuous professional development activities. Practitioners need to be fully aware of the benefits of effective transition policies and procedures, including some of the theories that underpin the policies, so they can provide for children’s PSED to ensure they are successfully implemented. In addition, they also need to have space so they can contribute to the improvement and development of approaches.

2. Effective transition policies and procedures follow a holistic approach, remaining respectful of the child as an individual and their parents, and acknowledging the importance of working in partnership with parents.

   Effective transition policies require flexibility to meet the needs of the individual child and their family. Parents provided contrasting views in relation to the staggered starts; some found it useful while working parents struggled with their childcare requirements. This investigation recommends settings introduce a greater aspect of ‘personalisation’ to the transition policy, especially in regards to children that have attended previous settings, so their individual needs can be better met.

3. Strong links between home and the setting are required to nurture children’s PSED.

   Settings could display photographs of children’s family members using a ‘family tree’ display or plan a show and tell session during circle time to provide children with strong links to home during sessions in setting.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of any successful transition policy will need the commitment of professionals to bring it all to life. This change can start with me as a reflective practitioner. My professional concern was to investigate the topic of transitions and extend my knowledge and
Research

understanding of their importance within Early Years settings and how effective policies and procedures impact on children’s PSED. During my investigation I have explored a wide range of literature relating to the topic of transitions, including the various techniques such as ‘home visits’ and ‘stay and play sessions’ used within Early Years setting as part of their effective transition policies.

Throughout both the review of background literature and the findings produced in the empirical study, it is apparent to me that it is vital for all Early Years setting to have an effective transition policy and procedure in place as they provide the foundations and insight to support children’s PSED during their time at the setting. This investigation highlights the positive impact of adults nurturing children’s emotional wellbeing as it is only once the initial needs of safety and security have been met that children are able to develop and learn to their full potential.

The findings from the ‘Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project’ (Sylva et al, 2012) have accentuated the successful nature of Early Years transitions in relation to children’s on going learning and development. Ainscow and Humphrey (2006) highlight where Early Years policies and procedures have influenced wider practice throughout the education system.

This investigation encourages practitioners to reflect on their current practise; therefore the literature review also explores children’s transitions in to school (Smith, 2011) as many practitioners responsible for supporting children’s transitions into Early Years setting will also play a key role in maintaining children’s emotional well-being as they move into reception. Due to a limitation of time and resources the focus of the empirical study explored children’s transition into their current pre-school setting, however, this investigation could be extended by continuing to observe the children within the focus groups transition into their reception year.
References


Allingham, S. (2011) Transitions in the Early Years: A practical guide to supporting children between early years and into key stage one. London: Practical Pre-School books


Research


Research


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