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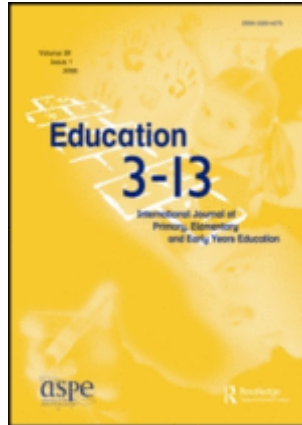
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3 **A pedagogical meeting place or a problem space? Extending play-**
4 **based pedagogy in Year One**
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Biographical notes:

Philip Nicholson is a PhD candidate in early childhood education at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln. His research interests include the transition from early childhood education to compulsory school, the relationship between these phases of education and the role of play-based pedagogy. His PhD research focuses on how settings in different sectors, maintained and independent, approach the transition from early childhood education to compulsory school.

Helen Hendry is a lecturer in Education (Masters) at the Open University and co-chairs the Leadership in Education pathway. Helen draws on her previous professional experience as a teacher, senior leader and educational advisor for inclusion from birth to five. Her research interests include early reading, reading and writing for pleasure, initial teacher education and professional development for early childhood practitioners in low resource contexts.

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For Peer Review Only

A pedagogical meeting place or a problem space? Extending play-based pedagogy in Year One

School readiness performance measures, such as the Good Level of Development (GLD), are increasingly associated with children's readiness to start formal learning, presenting challenges for supporting the transition to compulsory school. This research focuses on how an English primary school extended play-based pedagogy into Year One for children who did not achieve a GLD. Over a period of six-months, regular observations and interviews with senior leaders and teachers were carried out. The data cautions against an over-reliance on the GLD and identifies a number of challenges associated with extending play-based pedagogy into Year One when it is positioned as an intervention.

Keywords: transition; readiness; Good Level of Development; Year One; play-based pedagogy.

Introduction

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Compulsory School Education (CSE) are positioned as two different activity systems (Karila and Rantavuori 2014), informed by different visions, cultures and expectations (Huser, Dockett, and Perry 2015) and operating with different priorities and practices (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 2007). Traditionally, ECEC is holistic in its focus, emphasising play, exploration and interaction whereas compulsory school tends to prioritise the teaching of subject-specific knowledge and academic skills (Woodhead and Moss 2007; Wood and Hedges 2016). As Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) note, the emphasis in early childhood is on the '*act of learning*' while in compulsory school the '*object of learning*' takes precedence. These contrasting pedagogical traditions can mean that the transition from ECEC to CSE is a 'major challenge' (Huf 2013, 63) and a 'culture shock' (Broström 2007, 61) for some children. While a level of discontinuity in the transition to compulsory school is described as inevitable (O'Kane 2016) and even, in some instances, desirable (Walsh et al. 2008), it is important to avoid discontinuity that goes beyond children's ability to negotiate as

1
2
3 this may jeopardise later school success and the development of ‘positive life trajectories’
4
5 (Dockett and Perry 2014, 7).
6
7

8 In order to navigate the contrasting pedagogical traditions underpinning ECEC
9
10 and CSE, it has long been recommended that countries establish a strong and equal
11
12 partnership between these phases of education (OECD 2006), a type of relationship where
13
14 ‘neither culture takes over the other’ and both systems work to establish a ‘pedagogical
15
16 meeting place’ (Moss, 2008, 230). Yet, in the context of England, as well as in a number
17
18 of other anglophone countries, attempts to closer align ECEC and CSE have promoted a
19
20 relationship based on ‘readying’ children for formal learning (Moss 2013; OECD 2006).
21
22 In contrast to the notion of a ‘pedagogical meeting place’, a relationship based on
23
24 ‘readying’ is hierarchical; the ‘lower educational level, ECEC, must serve the needs of
25
26 the higher, CSE’ (Moss 2013, 36). This type of relationship has been consistently
27
28 reinforced by a number of policy technologies aimed at governing and controlling the
29
30 ECEC sector (Moss 2013; Roberts-Holmes 2019), contributing to the positioning of
31
32 school readiness as an ‘ultimate goal’ that teachers, children and families should work
33
34 towards (Wood and Hedges 2016, 393).
35
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39

40 An important school readiness technology, and one that holds particular relevance
41
42 for the present study, is the Good Level of Development (GLD), a single performance
43
44 measure indicating whether or not children have achieved an ‘expected’ level of learning
45
46 and development by the end of Reception (STA 2018). Although school readiness is
47
48 characterised by definitional ambiguity (Bingham and Whitebread, 2012), the GLD
49
50 indicator is identified as the closest official measure of school readiness (Hood and
51
52 Mitchell 2017, 91). This creates a binary distinction whereby children are assessed as
53
54 being ‘ready’ or ‘unready’ for Year One (Kay 2018; Wood 2019). Such a crude dualism
55
56 is firmly at odds with the notion of a ‘pedagogical meeting place’ (Moss 2008),
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1
2
3 positioning the compulsory school system as ‘inflexible’ (Petriwskyj, Thorpe and Taylor
4 2005, 57) and as one-size-fits-all (Bingham and Whitebread 2012). The GLD, and the
5
6 empiricist view of readiness it reflects, asserts that children must acquire specific skills
7
8 and knowledge in order to operate and succeed in compulsory school (Dockett and Perry
9
10 2002). This is highly problematic as government statistics (DfE 2019) show that in 2019,
11
12 28.2% of children in England did not reach a GLD by the end of their time in Reception
13
14 with these children being significantly more likely to have a Special Educational Need,
15
16 be born in the summer months or be eligible for Free School Meals. It is important to
17
18 caution that reaching a GLD, and therefore being perceived as ‘ready’, is not necessarily
19
20 a precursor to a successful transition to compulsory school, such is the difference between
21
22 ECEC and CSE pedagogical traditions. Yet, the significant numbers of children not
23
24 achieving a GLD, and therefore being deemed as ‘unready’ for Year One, represent a
25
26 particular ‘problem space’ for Year One teachers and school leaders to negotiate (Kay
27
28 2018, 181).
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34
35 It is this ‘problem space’ which provides the context for this article. Towards the
36
37 end of the Reception Year, leaders of a two-form entry school were concerned that a
38
39 considerable number of children, close to 50%, would be moving to Year One without
40
41 having achieved a GLD. The Head Teacher and senior leaders had the view that for these
42
43 children a traditional Year One approach and environment would be inappropriate and
44
45 perhaps even detrimental. Instead, they believed that extending the Early Years
46
47 Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum and pedagogical approach into Year One would
48
49 benefit these children more. They therefore decided to group children based on whether
50
51 or not they achieved a GLD. Children who did meet a GLD were grouped into a
52
53 ‘traditional’ Year One class and children who did not meet a GLD were to be grouped in
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1
2
3 a 'continuation' Year One class. The Head Teacher and EYFS Lead indicated they would
4
5 be willing for this new approach to be the basis of research.
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9 ***Extending the EYFS curriculum and pedagogical approach into Year One***

10
11 Extending EYFS curriculum and pedagogical principles into Year One encourages
12
13 teachers to retain a focus on 'purposeful play' and a balance of 'adult-led and child-
14
15 initiated activity' (DfE 2017, 9). This approach is popular, receiving support from
16
17 researchers (Alexander, 2010; Bingham and Whitebread 2012), school leaders (Roberts-
18
19 Holmes 2012) as well as both Reception (Early Excellence 2017) and Year One teachers
20
21 (Fisher 2011). Prolonging EYFS curriculum and pedagogy, and in particular play-based
22
23 pedagogy, is identified internationally as a strategy for 'bridging' the gap between early
24
25 childhood education and compulsory school (Broström 2005; O'Kane 2016). However,
26
27 in the context of England, where the school starting age is amongst one of the lowest in
28
29 the world, it is argued that play-based pedagogy should go beyond the 'boundary spaces'
30
31 of transition and be firmly embedded within the early years of compulsory school
32
33 education (Alexander 2010; Bingham and Whitebread 2012; Fisher 2011). Bingham and
34
35 Whitebread (2012) and Fisher (2010, 2011) argue that Reception (ages 4-5) and Year
36
37 One-aged (ages 5-6) children are progressing along similar trajectories and that the
38
39 significant change in curriculum and pedagogy between these year groups is not
40
41 developmentally justified. Instead, continuing to provide all children with a broad range
42
43 of experiences in Year One is beneficial (Bingham and Whitebread 2012; Walsh et al.
44
45 2006), helping children to build skills and confidence and develop positive learning
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47 dispositions (Alexander 2010).
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54
55 Extending an EYFS approach into compulsory school is supported by Walsh and
56
57 colleagues (2006) who investigated the implementation of two contrasting approaches to
58
59 the first year of compulsory school (ages 4-5) in Northern Ireland. They compared a
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1
2
3 formal, traditional approach which prioritises early academic achievement in literacy and
4 numeracy with an ‘enriched curriculum’ which places emphasis on play-based pedagogy
5 and child-initiated learning (Walsh et al. 2006). Walsh et al. (2006) implemented the
6 Quality Learning Instrument (QLI) to evaluate nine quality indicators such as motivation,
7 concentration, and independence. Although it is important to be sensitive to the
8 problematic nature of notions of ‘quality’ (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 2007), Walsh et
9 al. (2006) reported that an enriched curriculum scored higher than the traditional
10 curriculum on all nine quality indicators assessed in the QLI, leading them to conclude
11 that the enriched curriculum provided children with a ‘higher-quality learning
12 experience’ (Walsh et al. 2006, 219). These findings indicate that play-based pedagogy
13 has benefits for children’s holistic development. However, implementing such an
14 approach may present some challenges.

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When implementing play-based pedagogy in the early years of compulsory school, teachers are tasked with trying to manage the competing demands of ECEC and CSE pedagogical traditions (Alexander 2010; Fisher 2011). In taking this approach, teachers have raised concerns about accountability (Nolan and Paatsch 2017), namely, about how they can ensure educational value through play, especially in relation to literacy and numeracy (Walsh et al. 2010) and how they can achieve specific outcomes when following children’s interests (Martlew, Stephen, and Ellis 2011). Moreover, a lack of resources and inadequate provision (Fisher 2011), lower adult-to-child ratios (Fisher 2011; Martlew, Stephen, and Ellis 2011) and a lack of understanding and respect from colleagues (Nolan and Paatsch 2017) have also been identified as barriers to the extension of EYFS curriculum and pedagogy into compulsory school education.

In this challenging context, the research presented here aimed to investigate the implementation of a new transition arrangement where an EYFS, play-based approach

1
2
3 continued for one group of children whilst their peers move into a traditional Year One
4 class. The research focused on exploring the experiences of the teachers and pupils as the
5 changes were implemented and attempted to understand the factors that inhibited or
6 supported this new way of working. The research was guided by the following questions:
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- 10 • How does one school facilitate and implement play-based pedagogy for certain
11 children in Year One?
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- 13 • What factors support or inhibit the implementation of play-based pedagogy in
14 Year One?
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24 **Materials and Methods**

25 The study was small scale, focusing on one primary school that was extending play-based
26 pedagogy into Year One for children who did not achieve a Good Level of Development.
27 The school was a two-form entry primary academy based in an area of social and
28 economic disadvantage in a small English city. Whole school data for the academic year
29 2018-19 showed that pupils in receipt of Free School Meals, a marker commonly used to
30 denote pupils living in poverty, were almost double the national average at 47.6%. The
31 school had experienced a turbulent recent history and was rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted
32 in 2017. At the beginning of the study the new Head Teacher had been in post for less
33 than a year and the school had just been taken over by a new Academy Trust. The school
34 was selected opportunistically when one of the researchers learnt of the school's plan to
35 support children's transition to Year One differently during the 2019/20 academic year.
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53 The two co-researchers employed an exploratory case-study methodology
54 (Bassey 1999) as it offered the opportunity to answer 'how' and 'why' questions about
55 the implementation of play-based pedagogy in one Year One class (Yin 2009). The aim
56 was to describe the process and outcomes but also to consider the influential factors on
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1
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3 this experience, mainly from the perspective of the teachers involved. As a way of
4 understanding the complexities associated with extending play-based pedagogy into Year
5 One, Activity system elements (Engeström 2001; Yamagata-Lynch 2010) (Division of
6 Labour, Rules, Tools and Community) helped to inform data collection and initial
7 categories for analysis.
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15 The two co-researchers collected data through four school visits across two school
16 terms: Term 1, October 2019 and November 2019; and Term 2, January 2020 and
17 February 2020. In Terms 1 and 2, qualitative data were gathered through whole day
18 classroom observations in both Year One classes and semi-structured interviews with the
19 Head Teacher, both Year One class teachers, the EYFS Lead and Progress Lead.
20 Classroom observations took the form of chronological, descriptive notes about the
21 teaching activities, interactions and pupil responses which were combined with semi-
22 structured notes under key questions and prompts such as: ‘How are teaching assistants
23 and teachers working with pupils? (1 to 1, small group, alongside in play, whole class)’.
24 The observations offered an opportunity to observe pupil interaction and behaviour in the
25 two classes. They also served as an anchor for and enabled triangulation against staff
26 interviews (Merriam and Tisdell 2016).
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43 The purpose of the staff interviews was initially to establish the underlying aims
44 and beliefs about applying play-based pedagogy in Year One using questions such as
45 ‘Why did you decide to introduce this new way of organising Year One?’. They were also
46 used to establish details of organisation and implementation using questions such as ‘Can
47 you briefly explain your new approach to organising Year One this year?’. Perhaps most
48 importantly the different practitioners’ perspectives on the successes and challenges of
49 this approach over the school year were also sought through questions such as ‘Have there
50 been any challenges to this new organisation?’. These interviews were repeated, with
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3 slightly adapted questions, to see how both implementation and perspectives had changed
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5 in Term 2. Anonymised data relating to age, gender and attainment of the children in each
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7 class was also gathered from the school at the beginning of the study. Ethical processes
8
9 and considerations were adhered to and ethical approval was obtained in line with the
10
11 guidelines of the Open University, Bishop Grosseteste University and BERA.
12
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15 The data were first analysed under the broad categories of the Activity system
16
17 elements, Division of labour, Community, Tools and Rules. Then the researchers applied
18
19 an inductive thematic approach to draw out codes under each category (Braun and Clarke
20
21 2006). This process was repeated and refined with each piece of data until a set of agreed
22
23 codes was established between the two researchers and applied across the data. The
24
25 results are discussed under the key themes that emerged.
26
27

28 29 **Results**

30 31 32 *The development of a shared pedagogy*

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35 Themes from the interview data highlighted that there were tensions between the vision
36
37 for the project and the specific details of putting it into practice. At the beginning of the
38
39 study, a common rationale and shared vision for the continuation class was clear across
40
41 the staff. They believed that continuing play-based pedagogy in Year One had the
42
43 potential to support the pupils who did not attain a GLD:
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51 ... in terms of their grounding and what they learn in EYFS, the
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53 progress they make, is phenomenal and there's always been an
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55 argument that actually National Curriculum should replicate what they
56
57 do in EYFS ... because it is meeting those children's [who did not reach
58
59 a GLD] needs. (Head Teacher)
60

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3 However, although the senior leaders and teachers seemed in agreement about the need
4 for a different approach to learning for children not meeting the GLD, their own concepts
5 of play-based pedagogy and how this could be applied were quite different. The Head
6 Teacher and Progress Lead emphasised ‘closing the gap’ in attainment by the end of Year
7 One as preparation for later learning and assessment and so conceptualised this change in
8 activity as an ‘intervention’ to raise standards:
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19 If you don’t reach GLD then you wouldn’t normally meet your Year
20 One expected so actually if we can get a percentage of those children to
21 expected then for me that’s a huge success or actually get them close to
22 what the expectation is because I think they’ll close the gap later on in
23 school. (Head Teacher)
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30 Whilst the EYFS Lead focused on the skills that the pupils in the continuation class still
31 needed to develop:
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37 ... this cohort coming out, they didn’t need that focus and that routine
38 of sitting at a desk, they still needed to work on their dexterity to help
39 them write, they still needed the language skills that you get with small
40 world and role play. (EYFS Lead)
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46 She saw the ‘continuation’ class as a way of helping children to continue to ‘develop the
47 Prime areas and make that smoother transition when they are ready’.
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50 The ‘continuation’ class were taught by an EYFS teaching staff who moved ‘up’
51 into Year One for the first few weeks. However, the teacher was unable to continue with
52 the role due to a scheduled leave of absence and was replaced by an NQT who had no
53 experience of EYFS teaching. This change in personnel highlighted that the staff had not
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3 established a clear idea of pedagogy for the class and had relied on the individual EYFS
4
5 teacher to combine Year One objectives with play-based pedagogy.
6

7
8 A further unintended consequence of dividing the classes into continuation and
9
10 traditional was that the Year One teachers found it harder to plan together and tended to
11
12 work with limited dialogue and exchange of documents:
13

14
15
16
17 I think because of the staff mixing about and maybe clashes with staff,
18 they were on PPA and they weren't really talking so the two classes
19 became very separate and actually that is not what it is about, we want
20 them to be collaborative. (EYFS Lead)
21
22
23

24
25
26 Alongside the challenges of collaboration, there were other issues caused by a limited
27 understanding of the wider factors needed for effective play-based pedagogy. There was
28 no plan for re-distribution of resources or re-design of the classroom environment to allow
29 for learning through play. Although the Head Teacher indicated that there was increased
30 adult support in the classroom, through observation and discussion with the teachers it
31 became clear that one Teaching Assistant was designated to one specific child and the
32 other shared her time between a number of different classes. The impoverished resources,
33 in comparison to the resources observed in the Reception classrooms, and the lack of
34 teacher expertise in EYFS pedagogy prevented children from accessing play-based
35 provision, whether independently or with adult support.
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49 In retrospect, all the staff agreed that finding a pedagogy that could meet the needs
50 of this 'continuation' class was complex, requiring EYFS and Year One expertise:
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56 I think really ... it has to be really carefully thought out with staffing,
57 you kind of need EYFS teachers ... you really need to hand select your
58 staff to make sure that they fully understand everything that goes behind
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1
2
3 the early years curriculum, but equally how to push it to Year One.
4 (EYFS Lead)
5
6
7

8
9 After experiencing this process, there was strong agreement from all staff interviewed
10 that they needed to allow more time to plan how to move from vision to implementation,
11 allowing a shared pedagogy to emerge:
12
13
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15
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17 ... me articulating my vision is one thing but again realising that the
18 minute detail needed to be planned which we'd probably overlooked
19 various things because we thought we had the expert in the classroom
20 (Head Teacher)
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26
27 The Head, EYFS Lead and class teachers suggested that in future a shared pedagogy
28 could be more effectively developed by allocating more time for collaboration and
29 discussion between Year One and EYFS staff. They also acknowledged that sharing the
30 EYFS environment had the potential to support this way of working.
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40 ***Starting with the pupils***

41
42 A key barrier to the success of the school's new approach to Year One teaching was their
43 choice of pupil grouping. It was clear that staff had internalised the concept of reaching a
44 'Good Level of Development', based on the policy of EYFS national assessment, as the
45 significant marker of children's 'readiness' for a formal curriculum. In this school, the
46 cohort's drop in percentage of children meeting the national expectations for reaching
47 GLD was therefore the driving force behind their decision to split the classes:
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3 ... from the data last year we realised that there was around 50% of the
4 cohort who weren't actually ready for that more formal routine of the
5 Year One classroom. So, the plan for it was that half of the cohort would
6 go into a more Early Years approach ... And then in the other Year One
7 class it will be more structured, more formal. They were the children
8 that had that solid two ('expected' GLD measure) and the exceeding
9 statements and they were ready for that more sort of formalised learning
10 approach. (EYFS Lead)
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19 The grouping of children using the overall GLD measure provided equal class numbers
20 and ultimately led to a system of streaming. Consequently, the continuation class
21 contained only pupils who had not reached a GLD, many of whom were the youngest and
22 most disadvantaged in the year group. Data showed that the average age of pupils in the
23 continuation class was 5 years 6 months compared with 5 years 9 months in the traditional
24 class. There were also higher numbers of pupils with English as an additional language,
25 Special Educational Needs or in receipt of pupil premium funding, which is awarded to
26 schools to support children from low socio-economic backgrounds, children who are
27 Looked-After and children of service personnel (Table 1).
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43 Table 1. Pupil characteristics and number of children in each Year One class

Pupil Characteristic	Continuation Class	Traditional Class
English as additional language	5	3
Special Education Need	11	1
Pupil Premium	14	2

1
2
3 Interview and observation data showed that there were serious issues with
4
5 behaviour in the continuation class. Children were unable to engage safely with the
6
7 limited play activities on offer:
8
9

10
11
12 You saw the glitter tray... they had that in phonics last week... I had an
13
14 activity on each table and they all had a go on each activity in their set
15
16 groups. I modelled it but as soon as my back was turned they were
17
18 throwing it at each other. (Continuation class teacher)
19

20
21 The school staff attributed this 'spike' in behaviour problems as a symptom of the social
22
23 needs of the class and the fact that streaming had removed older or more socially
24
25 developed 'role models':
26
27

28
29
30 behaviour has been a huge challenge because there's all those complex
31
32 needs in one room, managing that is proving to be really challenging
33
34 and the skillset the teacher needs is to be extremely high (Head Teacher)
35
36

37
38 Time spent observing the two classes corroborated the differences between behaviour in
39
40 the two classes. Children from the continuation class frequently displayed off task and
41
42 inappropriate behaviour such as walking around the class when asked to be seated,
43
44 leaving the class unnecessarily and having to be retrieved, throwing small items across
45
46 the room. Despite the teacher's attempts to make whole class activities short and
47
48 interactive many of the class struggled to maintain attention and were unable to follow
49
50 questions or instructions. There were frequent emotional outbursts and problems with
51
52 managing self-care such as looking after belongings or dressing independently. However,
53
54 other factors may also have contributed to the pupils' problems with playing
55
56 harmoniously as the play-based opportunities on offer in the 'continuation' Year One
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2
3 class were very limited and offered little freedom for pupils to adequately explore and
4
5 follow their own areas of interest.
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7
8 Another problem as a result of streaming the classes based on GLD was that the
9
10 parallel Year One class were expected to adopt a very formal approach from the first week
11
12 of term. This meant that the usual period of transition was no longer in place for them.
13
14 The class teachers and EYFS Lead were particularly critical of this approach:
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19 I don't think that was done particularly well if I'm honest. I think it was
20
21 kind of almost thought that these children were ready and therefore we
22
23 will start. (Traditional class teacher)
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26
27 The Head Teacher and Progress Lead believed that because children in the traditional
28
29 Year One class had met a GLD they were ready for a formal curriculum and would no
30
31 longer benefit from play.
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33
34 Yet observations of the traditional Year One class during the first half of the
35
36 Autumn term identified that there were incidents of emotional outbursts or obviously
37
38 disruptive behaviour. The class also struggled with sustaining concentration in whole
39
40 class sessions and when asked to work independently on English and Maths tasks they
41
42 were often unsure of what to do:
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46
47 Good focus from the majority of the class for about 5 minutes. Then
48
49 some children start to lose focus/concentration. Teacher has to refocus
50
51 them. She needs to do this frequently. 'Able' group not on task, not
52
53 fully sure how to use the number line to find the missing number in the
54
55 number sentence. Also struggling to record legibly.
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57 (Observation notes, October 2019)
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3 The staff concluded that the social development of the pupils should have been taken into
4 consideration when forming the class groups. Using the GLD had provided an
5 unsophisticated measure of progress which did not allow them to fully consider the
6 complexity of children's needs. The EYFS Lead and Year One teacher working with the
7 continuation class were particularly convinced that continuing play-based pedagogy with
8 classes containing a mixture of ages, attainment and social development would have been
9 more successful.
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23 *Meeting expectations*

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25 A key theme arising from the data was the influence of both external and internal
26 expectations of school progress in Year One. The need to meet Year One expectations
27 and 'narrow the gap' in the year group as the pupils progressed through the school was a
28 primary driver to 'streaming' the two classes based on GLD. In the continuation class the
29 tension between the purported belief in the value of play-based pedagogy and pressure to
30 reach these targets was ever-present:
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41 having lots of complex needs in one classroom is an extra challenge
42 certainly and we need to deliver certain interventions as well ... but
43 they also need to make sure that they're meeting the objectives that they
44 need to meet in the Maths and the English. (Head Teacher)
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50
51 It meant that even when play-based pedagogy was attempted for the continuation class
52 there were still regimented daily timetabled sessions for 'Read Write Inc.' (school
53 phonics scheme), Maths and English.
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3 Some members of staff interviewed also described ‘pushing’ the traditional Year
4
5 One class to build on their GLD and translate that into exceeding the nationally expected
6
7 levels by the end of Year One:
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12 So if we are saying they got GLD and they are expected then we should
13
14 be pushing them to continue to be making that good level of progress.
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16 (Progress Lead)
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20 The history of the school contributed further pressure, as all staff were aware that the
21
22 school had been judged inadequate by Ofsted and that national curriculum outcomes and
23
24 testing were a key measure in future judgements:
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28
29 There has to be a new way. I mean teaching and learning were judged
30
31 inadequate. We have to do something drastically different to make it
32
33 better. (Head Teacher)
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36
37 In the second term of visits to the school this pressure and accountability were made
38
39 visible in a new system of teaching being introduced from Year One to Year Six. This
40
41 very prescriptive system of ‘Pace’ was imposed on the school by the Academy Trust,
42
43 with the intention of raising teaching standards, but it was not well suited to the children
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45 in Year One, particularly the continuation class:
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50 ... we’ve got a new pacing system and its basically ...5 minutes to do
51
52 a starter, 10 minutes to do something that they’ve previously done.
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54 Then its 5 minutes for a reasoning question. Then you’ve got your 8-
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56 minute input and then 20-minute activities. I have found this a little bit
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58 tricky because with my children that aren’t quite independent, yet we’re
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3 following the same curriculum pace as everyone else, but my children
4 aren't quite there. (Continuation class teacher).
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8 This academisation of pedagogy was not in line with the original goal of the continuation
9 class but led to a top down impact from SLT to class teachers:
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15 I know exactly within progress what I need to look at and we will feed
16 back to SLT. But then, the trust will come in and say 'right, I want to
17 know what you have been doing'. So, they hold us to account, but then
18 obviously we need to hold teachers to account in whatever we are
19 monitoring. (Progress Lead)
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26 In February 2020, after six months of working with the streamed Year One classes, the
27 school leaders and class teachers decided that this new approach had not been successful.
28 Play-based pedagogy had not been embedded in the continuation class and the pupils'
29 experiences of play were reduced to choosing from some puzzles, games and drawing
30 activities on a Friday afternoon and participating in more practical, adult supervised
31 activities as part of National Curriculum subjects such as Art, Science and Design
32 Technology.
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42 A decision was made to create two new groups of pupils for Maths and English
43 sessions every morning, returning to the continuation and traditional classes for
44 afternoons. The grouping of pupils was organised by the class teachers who were asked
45 to consider academic and social needs as well as the relationships within each group. The
46 Head Teacher could see how things could be improved in future by grouping pupils in
47 Year One based on more detailed consideration of specific academic and social needs.
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51 However, he was unsure if they would try the approach with the next cohort:
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3 Will we do the same next year? The answer is I don't know yet. I still
4 100 percent believe that play-based is the way forward but then I also
5 realise that maybe when we're splitting those children it's probably not
6 as easy as to say, 'Good level of development' and 'Not Good level of
7 Development'. It's looking at the specific strands of why they're not
8 getting GLD. (Head Teacher)
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17 **Discussion**

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19 The case study presented here investigated how and why a two-form entry school
20 redesigned their approach to teaching and learning in one of their Year One classes when
21 close to 50% of the cohort had not achieved a Good Level of Development by the end of
22 their time in Reception. Findings from this study appeared to confirm that the teachers
23 and senior leaders internalised the GLD measure as a legitimate indicator of children's
24 readiness to start formal learning, as suggested by Kay (2018) and Wood (2019). This
25 view led the school to group children who achieved a GLD into a traditional Year One
26 class and children who were still working towards a GLD in an EYFS continuation class,
27 an arrangement that epitomises the binary nature of the GLD (Kay 2018). This could be
28 considered as taking an empiricist view of what it means to be school ready, implying
29 that if children have not attained a normative check-list of requisite academic and
30 developmental criteria then they are not 'ready' and instead require an alternative
31 approach to the one offered in compulsory school education (Dockett and Perry 2002;
32 Meisels 1999).
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51 Evidently, the motive for continuing to deliver play-based pedagogy in Year One
52 for half of the year group was strongly influenced by the GLD indicator, affirming the
53 influence of school readiness performance measures on grouping practices (Roberts-
54 Holmes 2019). This was, however, in stark contrast to other studies reporting the
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3 extension of play-based pedagogy which are often identified as being motivated by the
4 need to provide children with a broader range of experiences in the first years of
5 compulsory school (Fisher 2011; Stephen, Ellis, and Martlew 2010; Walsh et al., 2006).
6
7 For example, the teachers in Fisher's research expressed a desire to move away from a
8 formal and prescribed pedagogy in Year One and Two in order to provide all children
9
10 with more developmentally appropriate opportunities and achieve 'a greater balance
11 between adult-led and child-initiated learning' (2011, 33). Central to the support for
12 extending this approach is that all children up until the age of seven can benefit from a
13 continued focus on learning through play, exploration and interaction (Alexander 2010;
14 Bingham and Whitebread 2012). However, in this instance, the school, and in particular
15 the Senior Leadership Team, saw the extension of an EYFS approach into Year One as
16 an intervention, intended to 'close the gap', with the only exception being the EYFS Lead
17 who held the view that every child is unique and would benefit from continued
18 opportunities to learn through play. The rationale for grouping children into an EYFS
19 continuation class was therefore dictated by the GLD and seen as a strategy for improving
20 children's readiness to start formal learning as opposed to a genuine desire for
21 pedagogical change in Year One. This was confirmed when the children who had
22 achieved a GLD were subject to an overly formal approach right from the start of Year
23 One.

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47 As the rationale for prolonging play-based pedagogy in Year One was policy
48 rather than practitioner initiated, attempts to develop and create a shared pedagogy and
49 vision for the continuation class were lacking. It was assumed that the children placed in
50 the continuation class would benefit from a replication of their experiences in Reception,
51 including continuation of play-based pedagogy and opportunities to 'develop the Prime
52 areas'. However, the over-reliance on one teacher to facilitate this meant that when she
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3 left, the school struggled to articulate their vision for the continuation class from which
4 the new teacher could assimilate, contribute towards and co-construct. Previous research
5 indicates that teachers interpret early years pedagogy in a number of different ways
6 (Martlew, Stephen, and Ellis 2011; McInnes et al. 2011) and the failure to establish and
7 articulate a shared understanding (Moss 2013) for the continuation class meant that the
8 new teacher reverted towards a more traditional Year One approach, in line with her
9 training and experience. This goes against the recommendations of Jay and Knaus (2018)
10 who identified that the establishment of a genuine learning community, encompassing
11 teacher mentorship, the introduction of collaborative year group teams and regular team
12 meetings where teachers can share ideas, resources and planning, was integral to
13 supporting the introduction of play-based pedagogy in a compulsory school context in
14 Western Australia. In addition, factors that have been identified in previous research, such
15 as a lack of support and understanding from colleagues (Nolan and Paatsch 2018), less
16 adult support (Martlew, Stephen, and Ellis 2011) and inadequate resourcing including
17 limited access to outdoor provision (Fisher 2011), all impeded the extent to which play-
18 based pedagogy could be effectively implemented in the Year One continuation class.
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40 The application of the GLD as the principle mechanism used to inform this
41 school's organisation of Year One meant that vitally important factors relating to each
42 child were overlooked. Each year, government statistics affirm that certain children,
43 particularly those born in the summer months, those with a Special Educational Need,
44 and those eligible for Free school Meals, are on average less likely than their more
45 advantaged peers to attain a GLD (DfE 2019). This pattern of attainment prompted Kay
46 (2018, 47) to argue that the GLD is in itself 'an act of marginalisation' that fails to take
47 into account the 'developmental complexities and variations of young children'. In failing
48 to look beyond the GLD, the approach taken by the school resulted in a situation whereby
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3 disadvantaged children were overwhelmingly and disproportionately grouped in the
4 continuation class. The adherence to and reliance on the GLD ultimately led to
5
6 inappropriate grouping, which Roberts-Holmes suggests is increasingly prominent in
7
8 Reception and Year One contexts due to increasing pressure on teachers and school
9
10 leaders to ‘maximise the production of required attainment data’ (2019, 8). This was
11
12 particularly evident as teachers discussed this way of organising Year One as an approach
13
14 that would benefit the children in both classes. It would enable children in the
15
16 continuation class to ‘catch up’ and ‘close the gap’ and it would allow the children in the
17
18 traditional Year One class to ‘push on’ with the added expectation of ‘converting’ their
19
20 GLD into an ‘expected’ level of attainment at the end of Year One.
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26 Although the GLD provided an equal split, which seemed attractive, as this school
27
28 was two-form entry, the implementation of this approach was highly problematic for both
29
30 classes. The behaviour of children in the Year One continuation class presented huge
31
32 challenges for the staff. Issues with pupil behaviour, while exacerbated by the lack of
33
34 resources provided for play and child-initiated learning, were mostly attributed to the
35
36 grouping together of children with highly complex social and developmental needs.
37
38 Whereas in the traditional Year One class, the presumption of children’s readiness for
39
40 formal learning led to an overly structured approach from the very start of the year,
41
42 meaning that there was little attempt to build on children’s experiences in Reception, as
43
44 is recommended by Dunlop and Fabian (2007) and Sanders et al. (2005). This lack of
45
46 ‘bridging’ (Huser, Dockett, and Perry, 2016) meant that children in the traditional Year
47
48 One class experienced discontinuity that seemed to go beyond their ability to negotiate.
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51 The expectation placed on these children to concentrate for sustained periods of time,
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54 during mostly adult-led learning activities, represented a significant departure from their
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3 Reception experiences and led to incidents of emotional outbursts and disruptive
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5 behaviour.
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8 In addition, by emphasising the GLD as the normative benchmark against which
9
10 children would be judged, children in Year One were subject to being labelled as being
11
12 either ‘ahead’ or ‘behind’ (Kay 2018) or as having or lacking competence (Ang 2014).
13
14 The labelling of young children against what is considered ‘normal’, carries with it a
15
16 strong risk of reduced or increased expectations and the subsequent grouping of children
17
18 based on ability (Roberts-Holmes 2019), as evidenced by the school’s expectations for
19
20 and organisation of children in Year One. These factors have strong implications for
21
22 inclusive practice. For example, Graue (2006, 53-54) argues that ‘An inclusive school
23
24 assumes that all children have a place in pedagogy, that thresholds have limited value in
25
26 planning instruction or placement of students’. However, the grouping of children based
27
28 on the GLD represents a move towards what Bradbury (2018, 7) refers to as ‘data-driven
29
30 teacher subjectivities’, where children’s ‘data double’, in this case their GLD score,
31
32 becomes more visible than that of the individual it is intended to represent.
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37
38 Although the intention in the continuation class was to extend an EYFS
39
40 pedagogical approach, the expectation for children to meet National Curriculum
41
42 objectives, particularly in Maths and English, and work towards the Phonics Screening
43
44 Test at the end of Year One meant that this vision was never fully embraced. In
45
46 accordance with other research (Martlew Stephen, and Ellis 2011; Nolan and Paatsch
47
48 2018; Walsh et al. 2010), the teachers in this study displayed concerns about how Year
49
50 One attainment targets could be met through a pedagogy which gives children
51
52 opportunities to direct their own learning. This meant that English, Maths and Phonics
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54 were taught at set times using a predominantly adult-directed approach, with child-led
55
56 learning restricted to more ‘practical’ National Curriculum subjects in the afternoon. In
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3 alignment with Fisher, it was clear that the teachers in this study held the view that certain
4 elements of the Year One curriculum, particularly those related to statutory assessment,
5 required 'systematic adult input' (2011, 39). The fulfilment of play-based pedagogy in
6 Year One proved difficult as it represents a collision of two very distinct pedagogical
7 traditions, namely, between '*the act*' and '*the object*' of learning (Pramling Samuelsson
8 & Carlsson 2008). Play-based pedagogy, with its emphasis on process, can contain
9 elements of spontaneity (Fung & Cheng 2012) and unpredictability (Wood 2007), yet
10 such ambiguities are seldom tolerated in the outcome-driven practices of compulsory
11 school education. Ultimately, the vision of play-based pedagogy in Year One was
12 abandoned, succumbing to the 'gravitational pull' of compulsory school education and
13 its powerful and established pedagogical tradition (Moss 2008, 225).

14
15 This was epitomised by the decision to move towards a pedagogy based on 'pace'
16 for all children in Years One to Six. This top down, one-size-fits-all approach, imposed
17 on the school by the Academy Trust with the intention of driving standards, oversaw a
18 shift to a highly prescriptive pedagogy based on imparting knowledge. This method,
19 which represents a significant departure from the original aim of extending EYFS
20 pedagogical principles into Year One, is easier for children to demonstrate and for
21 teachers to measure, both of which are indicative of a neoliberal education model that
22 fosters performativity (Ball 2003) and values the measurement of educational outcomes
23 (Biesta 2009).

24
25 The extension of play-based pedagogy in Year One (ages 5-6) and beyond is
26 widely supported as it continues to provide all children, regardless of ability, with a broad
27 range of experiences throughout important years of development. However, given the
28 established pedagogical tradition of compulsory school, extending a pedagogy based on
29 play and children's interests, if it is to be successful, necessitates a long-term perspective,
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3 requiring constant reflection, ongoing professional learning as well as support and
4 understanding from the wider school community (Fisher 2011; Jay and Knaus 2018). Yet,
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6 in the present case study, this pedagogical change was interventionist, positioned as a way
7
8 of helping a group of children who did not reach a Good Level of Development to ‘close
9
10 the gap’. This seemed to impact the extent to which a vision for the continuation class
11
12 was developed, shared and supported by the wider school community. The data presented
13
14 also draw attention to the highly problematic nature of the GLD as in this case it led to
15
16 inappropriate grouping practices that failed to take into account children’s social and
17
18 emotional development as well as their cognitive capabilities.
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25 **Disclosure statement**

26
27 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.
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Table 1. Pupil characteristics and number of children in each Year One class

Pupil Characteristic	Continuation Class	Traditional Class
English as additional language	5	3
Special Education Need	11	1
Pupil Premium	14	2

For Peer Review Only