A Handbook Guide for Nursery Key Workers During Transitional Periods.

"The propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals is a basic component of human nature" – Bowlby (Moore, no date. No page).

(Source: Google, no date).

2009618

EAEE4003

Contents **Page**

Transitions in the early years

The role of the adult

The needs of the child

Partnerships

Interventions

Proposed outcomes

Reference list

Transitions in the Early Years

This Handbook guide is designed to:

- ✓ Inform Key Workers of transitional periods
- ✓ Identify the role of the key worker
- ✓ Identify the needs of the child
- ✓ Identify ways in which to work in effective partnership to ease transition periods
- ✓ Formulate intervention strategies
- ✓ Identify successful transitional periods

What is a transition?

Transitions are described as a way of life and one of the most significant transitions for children in their early years is believed to be the transition from home and their familiar caregiver to a nursery school setting (Brooker, 2018). Transitions are said to involve a level of change and almost always involves leaving something substantial behind, for example, familiar environments, familiar care givers and people (Dunlop and Fabian, 2006).

According to the flying start transition guidance, researchers suggest that there are two different types of transitions, horizontal transitions and vertical transitions (Welsh Government, 2017).

Vertical Transitions

A vertical transition is a way of describing a transition that presents a significant and major change in a child's everyday life and routine, starting school is often described as a vertical transition (Welsh Government, 2017).

Horizontal Transitions

Horizontal transitions are categorised as less significant changes in a child's routine but are describes as the smaller transitions that support and impact the child's experience of the major vertical transitions (Welsh Government, 2017).

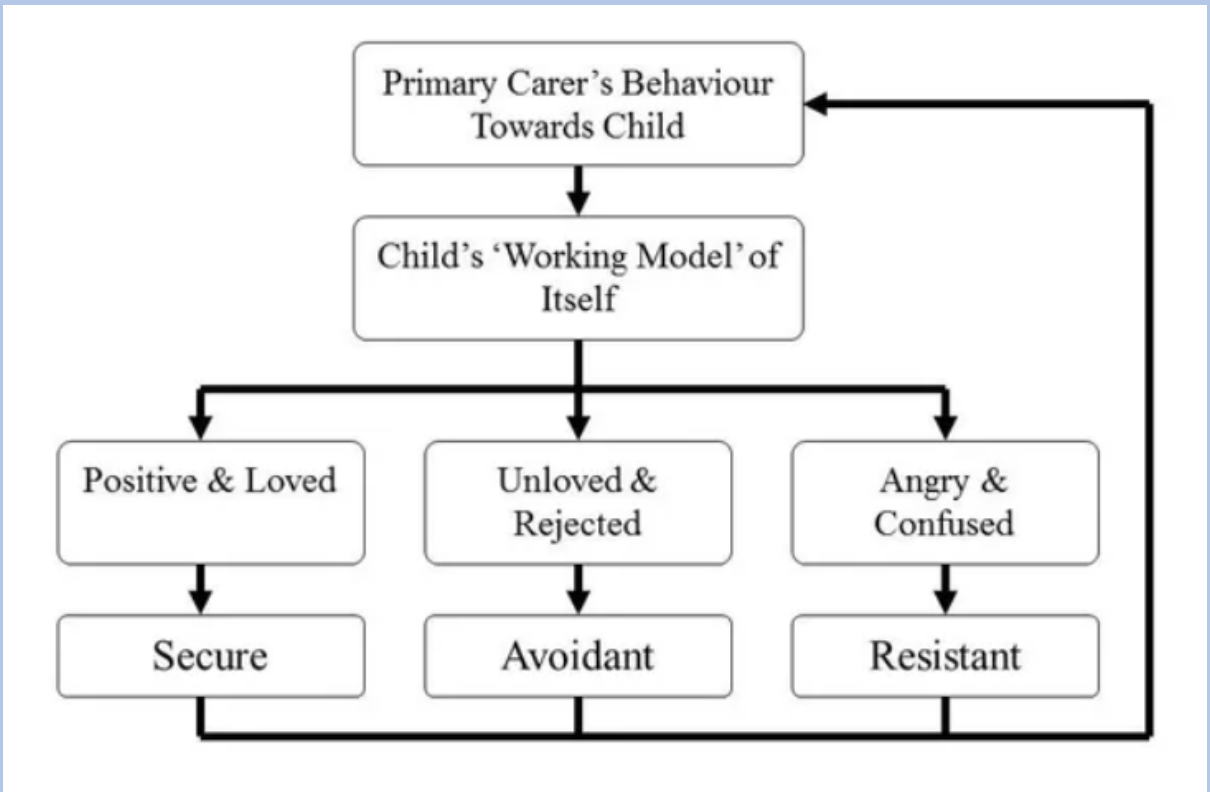
Research has previously shown that vertical transitions are identified as being one of the major milestones in early childhood, studies have shown that life changing, sometimes referred to as vertical transitions, can be stressful for young children (Belfast Education and Library Board, no date).

Why do children find transitions stressful?

A widely researched and discussed theory linking to transitions is the Attachment Theory. There are many different theorists who have different ideas on how and why children attach to a primary care giver. Bowlby believed that children are born to form an attachment in order to survive and includes the concept of monotropy. Monotropy suggests that children may have one attachment that is the most important to them and may react differently when separated from their strongest attachment (McLeod, 2017). According to (Holmes, 2006) Bowlby formulated and published a series of papers on the attachment theory between the years of 1958 and 1963 and his findings suggest that children who have been separated from their parents or primary caregiver can experience intense forms of anger, withdrawal and deep emotional upset (Holmes, 2006).

According to (McLeod, 2017) Bowlby also suggests that secure attachments are consolidated in the first 2 ½ - 3 years of a child's life, he believed that failure to secure these early attachments can have a lasting, negative impact on a child's development. Below is a diagram of

how the attachment relationship between a child and their primary caregiver can impact a child's working model of itself.



(Source: McLeod, 2017: np).

Mary Ainsworth who worked alongside Bowlby developing the attachment theory discusses the idea of a child regarding its parent as a secure and safe place, her research has shown an indication of the importance of maintaining a secure attachment between the child and primary care giver. Ainsworth led an observational study in the 1970s called the strange situation test, which led her to believe that there are different qualities of attachment that can be measured using her strange test technique (Keenan, Evans and Crowley, 2016).

Below is a table showing the three main Attachment styles identified by Ainsworth from the findings of her strange situation test. The table shows how different children with different attachment styles towards their primary care giver can react when put in a situation where they are separated from said care giver (McLeod, 2018).

(Source: McLeod, 2018).

	Secure	Resistant	Avoidant
Separation Anxiety	Distressed when mother leaves	Intense distress when the mother leaves	No sign of distress when the the mother leaves
Stranger Anxiety	Avoidant of stranger when alone, but friendly when the mother is present	The infant avoids the stranger - shows fear of the stranger	The infant is okay with the stranger and plays normally when the stranger is present
Reunion behavior	Positive and happy when mother returns	The infant approaches the mother, but resists contact, may even push her away	The Infant shows little interest when the mother returns
Other	Uses the mother as a safe base to explore their environment	The infant cries more and explores less than the other two types	The mother and stranger are able to comfort the infant equally well

The role of the adult

What is a key worker system?

The key worker system approach is thought to be defined from Bowlby's findings during his attachment theory research and is designed to enable children to form secure emotional attachments in order to settle and thrive in their new environments (Mickelburgh, 2011).

A Key Worker sysytem is described as a way of forming and supporting secure, emotional attachments specificly between early years practitioners and specific children in their care. In practice, a designated

member of staff would be responsible for a specific group of children in the setting. The childs key worker would undertake a caring and personal relationship in order to form secure attachments (Mickleburgh, 2011). According to a journal article published in 2019, the key worker system is viewed as a provision of high quaity and provides children with high quality interactions which in turn will support their transition into confidently exploring their surroundings and gain the confidence to build relationships with additional care givers and peers alike (Wilson-Ali et al. 2019) . A key worker system is seen as good practice and according to the Every Child Matters framework ,every child must be assigned a Key Worker and the identify of the key worker should be disclosed to parents at the earliest oppurtunity (HM Government. 2017).

What is a key worker's role during transitions?

One of the main roles of a key worker during transitional periods is to provide children with a sense of well-being, to eventually feel that they belong within their new environment and to feel that they have a sense of belonging amongst the adults and children within the setting (Brooker, 2008). Research has also shown that transitions play a key part in children's development and emotional wellbeing. It is thought that the way in which the earliest transitions are dealt with and the children's experiences of these said transitions can determine the way in which they cope with future transitional periods later in their development (The Educator UK, 2017).

The Every child Matters framework describes the role of a key worker as being the person who helps children in all aspects of their care and development, and emphasis is placed on the role of the key worker tailoring the deliverance of care to meet the child's individual needs. The key workers responsibilities also include regular engagement with children's parents or guardians in order to build a clear picture of how best to support the child during their transition and how to promote children's learning and development at home (HM Government, 2017).

The key worker approach recognises that children are comforted by familiar people and familiarity, the approach is designed to make the child feel comfortable and familiar with their key worker before they have started in the setting. The Key workers responsibility begins before the transition to nursery has started and should make time to meet with the parents and child either at the setting or at home to get to know them and gather relevant information that can help make the process for the transition to be smoother and less distressing for the child (Mickelburgh, 2011).

The needs of the child

What does a child need during times of transitions?

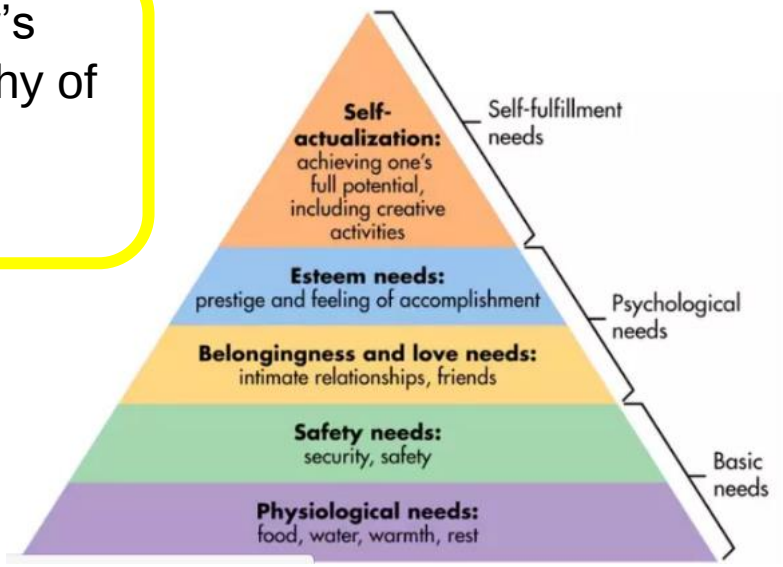
It is paramount that children receive the best possible start in life and deserve their needs to be met in order to reach their full potential. It is suggested that children are enabled to reach their full potential when their basic individual needs are met. Children need to feel and be kept safe, secure and healthy , these needs, when met by an adult who has built up a strong and caring relationship with the child can ensure that the child's emotional well-being is of the upmost priority (HM Government, 2017).

Maslow's Hierarchy of needs theory suggests that a human's needs consist of a five level tier system each one needing to be fulfilled in order to reach their full potential (Mcleod, 2020). The Physiological needs, which need to be fulfilled for survival, need to be met before attempting to fulfil the next need of safety and security. A child needs to feel safe and secure in order to form a secure attachment with someone who is not their primary caregiver. Once a child's basic needs have been met and fulfilled, according to Maslow, the psychological layer of the hierarchy can begin to be met where a child feels loved and a sense of

belonging, which in turn enables them to form secure and strong attachment relationships (Pierre, 2015).

By meeting these particular needs, practitioners are enabling children to feel safe, secure, confident and happy within their new environment. It is suggested that children need to be loved and to have a strong sense of belonging, this in turn has a direct impact on how they build happy, and healthy meaningful attachments with their key worker (Stewart, 2014).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.



(Source: Simply Psychology, 2020)

Not only is it paramount that practitioners met the needs of the child for the purpose of attachment and transitions, it is also a legal requirement for the child's needs to be met. The United Nations Convention on the rights of a child, founded in September 1990 states that all children have the right to survive and develop to their full potential and also have the right to be kept safe, by fulfilling the needs of the child at the most basic level in turn, will contribute to their rights and provide opportunities to reach their full potential. (Unicef, no date).

The Welsh Government (2002) set out a policy that suggests that play is crucial to the development and survival of humankind. The play policy suggests that play is needed to nurture a child's holistic development. Play is seen as invaluable for children's learning and development skills and can provide children with opportunities to communicate their needs

alongside making sense of their world and the adults around them (Loizou, 2017).

By identifying and meeting the needs of the child at the simplest level, an attachment and relationship can begin to be formed linking the child to the key worker (Holmes, J. 2006).

Partnerships

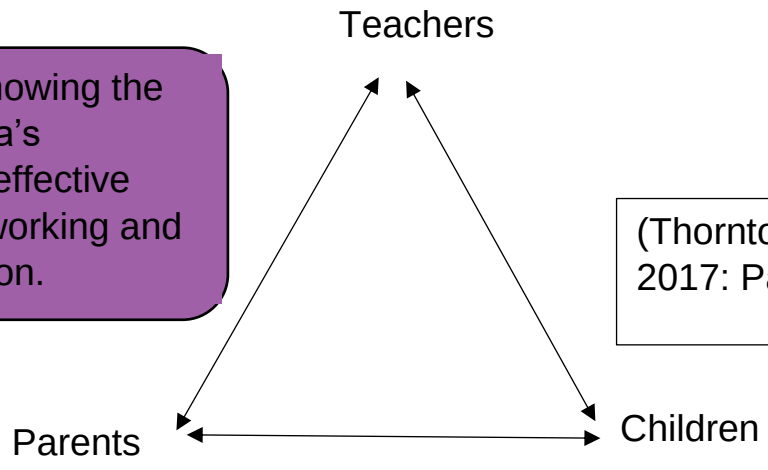
Why is it important to work in partnership during transitional periods?

Transition research has previously shown that before the 1900s transitions were only categorised as a one off event, for example starting school or moving to a new setting, but research undertaken more recently has given insight that transitional periods are described more of a process whereby children, practitioners and parents all work together in order to support each other during these times (Welsh, Government, 2017). According to an article written in the foundation phase forum, transitional periods such as starting school can often be a difficult time for parents as well as children, and it is considered to be important to liase and build relationships with parents in order to best support the child. Parents should be reassured that although children establishing secure attachments with their key worker can be extremely beneficial it is not designed to replace the attachment bonds at home (Mickleburgh, 2011).

The Reggio Emilia approach also emphasis' on the importance of positive relationships with strong bonds at the centre of its approach to transisitions and learning. The approach focuses on children,

practiitioners, and parents all working together with their own role to play in order to creaste these attachmenrts and bonds and deliver effective learning (Thornton and Bruton , 2007).

A diagram showing the Reggio Emilia's approach to effective partnership working and communication.



(Thornton and Bruton, 2017: Page 12).

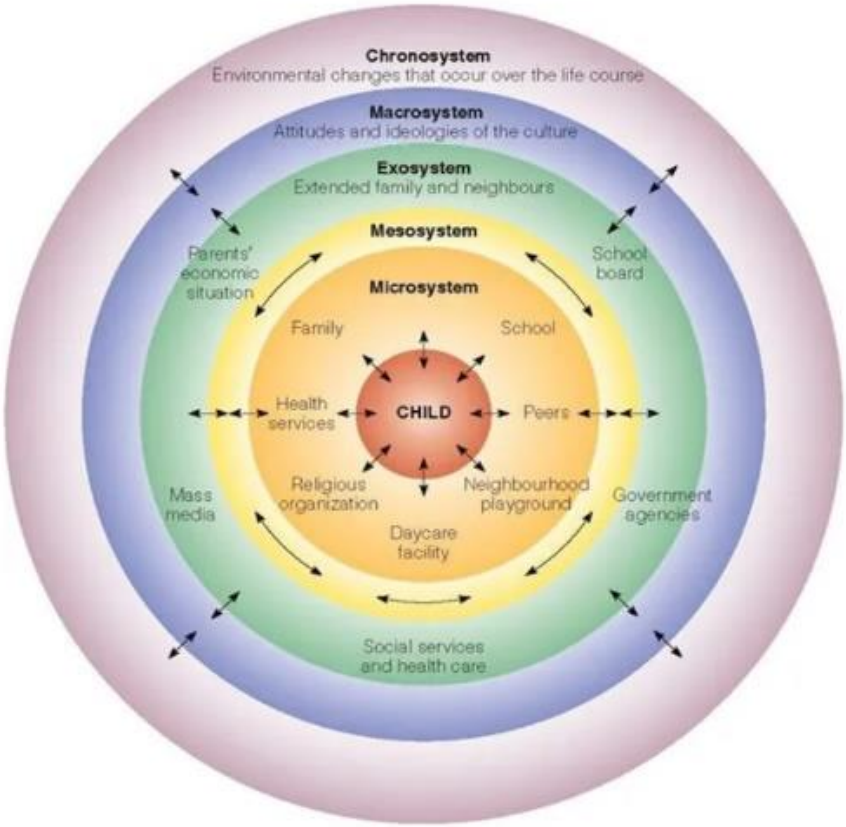
As a key worker it is important to build and maintain relationships with parents as transitional periods can present themselves at any given moment during the child's time at the setting. Transitions including the birth of a sibling or the loss of a loved one, through separation or death are all major transitions in a child's life and ensuring effective communication in order to liase with parents or guardians on how the child is dealing with the transition at home, and in the setting can prove invaluable on how best to support the child during these transitional periods (Brooker, 2008).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory sees children as a product of their environments and a significant change in their environment will result in how they present themselves as an individual therefore having an impact on their development (Brooker, 2018). The theory suggests that a child's development is made up of five levels of a complex relationship system. This theory can be viewed in such a way that shows how important each layer is to a child's holistic development, and emphasises the importance of effective partnerships with parents and the wider community for effective and smooth transitions .The system layers suggest that each layer of the environment in which the child is a part of, has an impact on the layer before and after, therefore influencing the child's view of the transition and can have a direct impact on their development. (Gray and Macblain, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner believed that the most contact was between the child and their immediate family, known as the microsystem. He suggests that this is the layer, which is the most influential, communicating with the other layers including the mesosystem could be beneficial to the child's holistic development (Gray and Macblain, 2012).

A diagram of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory.

(Source: Bing, no date)



Interventions

How Can Key workers ensure smooth transitional periods?

It is widely thought that children who are happy and well settled will develop a higher sense of well-being and belonging, and in turn achieve

more positive outcomes regarding their learning and development. During transitional periods for a child's individual attachment needs to be met an individual transitional plan needs to be created and delivered (Early Education, no date).

During transitional periods it is important that the setting adopts an approach where the transitional experience fits around the child and their individual needs rather than the child fitting in with the setting (Belfast Education and Library Board, no date).

It is looking at this approach that there are some methods in which practitioners can tailor to ensure children are well catered for and their individual needs are met. The most effective time to begin the transitional period is the term before the child begins starting nursery school (Belfast Education and Library Board, no date).It is during this time that a key worker should be assigned and a meeting between the parents and child at the setting should be undertaken to find out relevant information on the individual needs to ensure the child's well-being, some important points to consider are,

- Does the child have any individual or special needs that need to be considered during transitional periods? Has there been any attachment or early trauma in the child's life? (Early Education, no date).
- Does the child have any developmental or learning needs that the key worker should be aware of? Have they met all developmental checks conducted by the health visitor? (Early Education, no date).
- What is their family background? Who do they live? Are there any other significant people in their life that are important to them? (Mickelburgh, 2011).
- What are the child's interests? Do they have a favourite toy/comforter that can help them feel safe and secure at their new setting? (Mickelburgh, 2011).

By ensuring this personal and sensitive information is gathered by the relevant key person, can in turn reflect in a tailored transitional plan unique for the child and their individual needs (Early Education, no date). Research has previously shown that children can find the size of their new school and the new large group of peers extremely daunting (Belfast Education and Library Board, no date).

It is deemed important that well planned out transitional visits and information can be provided to the child and their families on every occasion, arranging visits to the nursery alongside a small group of their future peers to take part in activities , giving the child the opportunity to explore their new surroundings and mapping out key areas like the toilets, where they hang their coats up in order for them to feel well prepared for their first day and are familiar with their new surroundings (Belfast Education and Library Board, no date). As a visit to the nursery setting cannot always be facilitated, for certain circumstances, a handbook or booklet describing the setting, the daily routine with photographs of the setting and their key worker to help with familiarity can also aid smooth transitions and can be used as a tool to familiarise the child and parent with the new setting and create opportunities for discussion to identify the child's feelings towards this transition (Belfast Education and Library Board, no date).

A transitional object like a blanket or a comforter can have an effect of keeping the child's link to their parent and home environment in keeping with Bronfenbrenner's theory of the child's entwined systems staying linked and making the child fell closer to home and their parent (Trodd, 2013).

Banduras social experiment in 1962 led him to unveil his theory of social learning in which it is suggested that children learn through observations and can imitate the behaviours of the adults around them, in which case it is important for key workers, during transitional sessions to model how to play and access their new environment for the children to gain confidence to be able to feel safe and secure enough to explore their surroundings independently (Gray and Macblain, 2012).

Proposed Outcomes

How do practitioners know that a child has effectively transitioned?

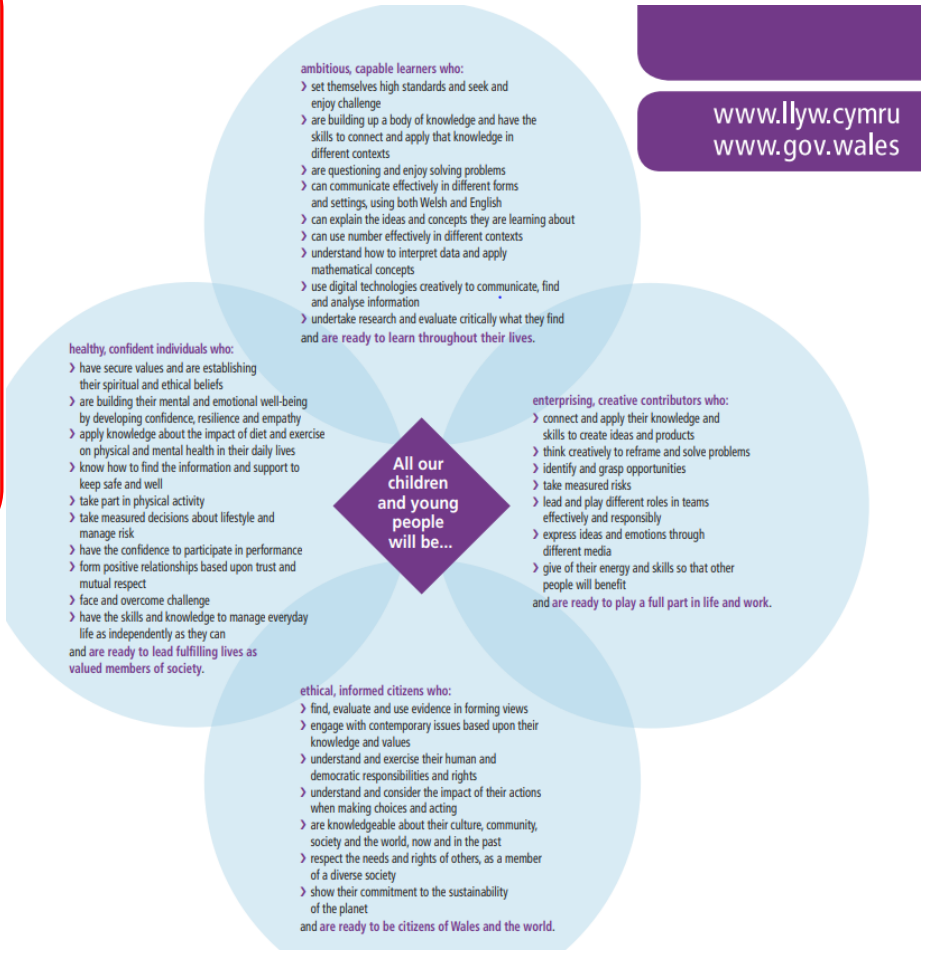
Transitions will be inevitable for all children and young people through the course of their early years and beyond, according to Brooker (2008), it is these transitions that can have an impact on their lives but more

importantly , children's experiences of these transitions can have an impact on their learning and development.

The new curriculum for Wales being implemented in 2022, sets out a holistic approach where children are on a journey, and over time should achieve the 4 main purposes of the curriculum to grow up as strong , confident, emotionally resilient individuals who have built up skills and knowledge to make sense of, and be a part of the world they live in (Welsh Government, 2020).

The four main purposes set out by the welsh government in 2015.

(Source: Welsh government, 2015).



In agreement with the four purposes outcomes for children is the Froebelian approach, which encourages children to be confident and capable enough in their environments to make decisions, solve problems, become independent thinkers and explore themselves as individuals (Tovey, no date). In respect to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs by meeting a child's needs at the basic and physiological needs during these transitions, should eventually enable a child to build up their self-

esteem enough to reach their full potential at the self-actualisation layer of their needs in order to accomplish the skills set out by Froebel (Pierre, 2015). With effective transitional periods through a child's life, practitioners would hope to see children with confidence skills and a clear sense of belonging, the Te Whariki approach also encourages their learners to grow up as confident learners with a clear sense of belonging(Lee et al, 2013).