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Beliefs and Relationships during Children's Transition to School: Parents, Practitioners and Teachers

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**Beliefs and Relationships during Children's
Transition to School: Parents, Practitioners and Teachers.**

By Karen Lesley Wickett

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Professional Doctorate of Education

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Beliefs and Relationships during Children's Transition to School: Parents, Practitioners and Teachers.

Abstract

Young children's experiences, which include their transition to school, can influence not only their academic outcomes but also their life chances. This understanding has led to governments in England investing in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector over the past 20 years. Over time a "discourse of readiness" has become increasingly apparent in ECEC policies. The revised Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2012a) framework states that the purpose of the framework is to ensure children are ready for school. Increased political involvement in the sector has led to parents/families, ECEC practitioners and teachers sharing the task of preparing children for school. The aim of this research is to explore parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs about the nature of children's school readiness and the relationships between them as they prepare and support children during their transition to school. A case study approach was adopted. There are two cases, each comprising a school and an ECEC setting (sharing the same site) and their respective groups of parents. Interviews and focus groups were used to gain insights into parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs and relationships.

In this thesis the conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School' has been developed. The framework identifies both readiness and adjustment as two aspects of a transition. Also represented are the relationships between those who prepare and support children. Four types of relationships were identified: a distant relationship, a dominant relationship, a familiar relationship and a utopian relationship, with each relationship having different qualities. Certain relationships and the associated interactions were prone to change during the transition.

Findings highlight practices that foster the qualities of relationships which are more likely to support children's adjustment to school. Using these findings ECEC practitioners, teachers and local and national political administrators of education can aim to create transition policies and practices that foster these relationships between the adults. Through maintaining the focus on these relationships, children are likely to have a successful transition and positive attitude to school.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------------------|---|
| BA | Bachelor of Arts |
| CGFS | Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage |
| CSE | Compulsory School Education |
| DCSF | Department of Children, Schools and Families |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| DoH | Department of Health |
| DLOs | Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education |
| ECEC | Early Childhood Education and Care |
| ECM | Every Child Matters |
| ELGs | Early Learning Goals |
| EYDCP | Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships |
| EYFS | Early Years Foundation Stage |
| EYFS (DfE,2012a) | Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage |
| EYFSP | Early Years Foundation Stage Profile |
| FLP | Family Learning practitioner |
| FSA | Family Support Advisor |
| FG | Focus Group |
| FdA | Foundation Degree in the Early Years |
| LA | Local Authorities |
| LEA | Local Education Authority |
| NNEB | Nursery Nurse Examination Board |
| NPQICL | National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centres Leadership Qualification |
| OfSTED | Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills |
| KS1 & 2 | Key Stage One and Two |
| KS1 NC | Key Stage One National Curriculum |
| MA Ed | Masters in Education |

| | |
|-------|---|
| NC | National Curriculum |
| SATs | Standard Attainment Tests |
| SCITT | School Centred Initial Teacher Training |
| SEP | School Entry Plan |
| SSCC | Sure Start Children's Centre |
| SSLP | Sure Start Local Programme |
| Sym | Symposium |
| QTS | Qualified Teacher Status. |

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Professional Doctorate of Education has the author been registered for any other University award without prior consent of the Graduate School.

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During the early days of the Doctorate I attended research skills seminars, lectures and study days. In 2014 I took part in the first round of the postgraduate Three Minute Thesis competition at Plymouth University

Work has been presented at the following conferences:

- 2015 The Transition to School: a Relational Experience - EECERA Barcelona
- 2015 The Readiness Debate – Early Education Annual Conference
- 2014 The Transition to School – LoFE Transition Symposium, Plymouth University
- 2014 The Transition to School an Opportunity (or not) to Talk, ECERA, Crete
- 2014 The Transition to School – IHC Postgraduate Research Student Conference, Plymouth University
- 2014 Transitions for Two-year-olds – keynote Early Years Conference, Taunton
- 2014 Transition to School - Take Art and InspirED partner Spaeda workshop on how a range of art forms can help with transition in Early Years.
- 2013 What does it mean 'to be ready? Roundtable – IHC Postgraduate Research Student Conference, Plymouth University

Publications

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Since schooling in England was made compulsory in 1880, there has been an implicit assumption that parents will prepare their children to be ready to start school, as it was generally believed the care and education of the youngest children was the responsibility of the family (Moss, 2006). Such preparations have happened in the private domain of the home, out of view of professionals and politicians. During

the 1990s politicians, from each of the political parties, became aware that the early years of a child's life can influence his/her educational outcomes and life chances. It was viewed that living in poverty is particularly detrimental to children's outcomes and that 'worklessness' is one of the causes of poverty (Strategy Unit Project Team, 2002). Mothers from 'poor' families have been encouraged into work, as it is considered that their income to the household is a way of lifting them and their family out of poverty (Strategy Unit Project Team, 2002). These political understandings led to an expansion of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, an increase state funding for the sector and many ECEC policies over the past 20 years. The shifts in political views have been paralleled by changes in society's attitudes to women/mothers working and views on the responsibility for the care of the youngest children. It is now a generally held belief that mothers and fathers share this role with the state (Fthenakis, 1998; Moss, 2006).

Not only is the ECEC sector viewed as providing care for the youngest children, whilst parents work, but also as an intervention that can reduce the gap in educational achievement between disadvantaged children and others. A key point during children's early years, which contributes significantly to their future success at school and thus to their life chances, is the transition to school (Brooker, 2008; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Educational Transitions and Change (ECT) Research Group, 2011; Griebel & Niesal, 2009). These insights have led politicians to view the transition to school with particular interest. In 2012 the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government published the revised the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage¹ (EYFS), which stated that the purpose of the

¹ During the research ECEC practitioners and reception teachers were implementing the revised Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012a). In September 2014 the framework was again

framework was to promote 'teaching and learning to ensure children's school readiness' (DfE, 2012a:2). From this political perspective it is considered that if children are school ready when they start school they are likely to have a successful transition to school. A challenge for those implementing the framework is that school readiness and other derivatives of the term are difficult to define (Graue, 2006; Kagan & Rigby, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2002). The complexity of defining the term has led academics around the world to attempt to make sense of the concept and how to measure children's readiness (Graue, 2006; Meisels, 1999).

When the term school readiness was explicitly referred to in the EYFS (DfE, 2012a) I was a Sure Start Children's Centre (SSCC) teacher. Originally, in 2003, I was employed as the Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) teacher and later became the SSCC teacher. My role was to support and develop the pedagogy in the SSLP, SSCC and the associated ECEC setting. During this period the ECEC practitioners and myself established and developed relationships with the school personnel. These relationships enabled opportunities for the reception teacher and ECEC practitioners to visit each other's settings and to moderate assessments of the children's learning. Although these activities took place the relationships between the ECEC setting and school personnel were fragile. Contributing factors to the fragility of these relationships between ECEC practitioners and teachers were the differences in their 'judgements on children's attainment' (Ellis, 2013:5) when children started school and 'competing philosophies and differing interpretations of the EYFS' (Ellis, 2013:5). Teachers and ECEC practitioners appeared to have different beliefs about the teaching and learning processes, which resulted in them

revised. For the purpose of this thesis I will refer to the former framework as this was in use when the study was conducted.

having different practices. Soon after the inclusion of the term 'school readiness' in the EYFS (DfE, 2012a: 2) I observed further tensions in the relationship between the ECEC setting and the school. Noticing the increased tension in this relationship, I was motivated to explore ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs about school readiness and the relationships between them during children's transition to school. As parents share this task with ECEC practitioners and teachers, I believed it important to include them within the research.

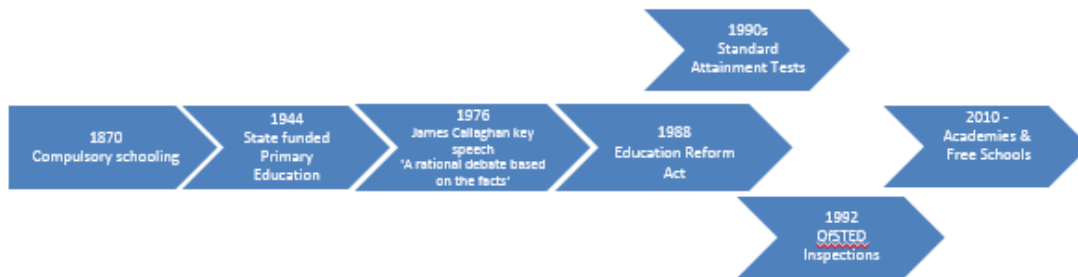
One explanation of the different practices and views of pedagogy is that school and the ECEC setting have evolved from different beginnings. The discussion below outlines these and some of the key points that have shaped the Compulsory School Education (CSE) and the ECEC sector trajectories to the current day.

1 Two Different Trajectories - Compulsory School Education and Early Childhood Education and Care

1.1 Schools and Schooling

It is generally accepted in English society that school is an institution where children go to learn, but the purpose of school can and has differed throughout history. Changes in society, such as the Industrial Revolution, have influenced the construct of children, the political priorities for children and the purpose of schooling (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hendrick, 1997; Jones, 2003). Historically children have been constructed as victims, as threats or as investments for the benefit of society (Hendrick 1997). School has, therefore, been viewed as an intervention to promote social order (Hargreaves, 1994) and to prepare children for work (Hendrick, 1997; Ball, 2003). Figure 1 highlights some of the key points in the development of compulsory school education. Then follows further discussion about how these

have shaped the purpose of school, the provision for children, teachers and, finally, families.



1.1 Figure 1: Compulsory School Education in England

Education Acts, during the 1870s, made the recommendation that it should be compulsory for all children to attend elementary school. It was in the 1880 Education Act that these recommendations became law and school attendance became compulsory for all children from five to ten years old. The Anglican Church controlled and funded the majority of schools in England at that time (Jones, 2003). The introduction of mass schooling was a result of changing attitudes towards children and childhood (Hendrick, 1997). Some adults were concerned that children working in factories were being exploited by their employers. Others argued that children from the 'perilous groups' in society would continue to replicate their groups'/families' 'malevolent ways' unless there was an intervention' (Hendrick, 1997:45). The purpose of school was to ensure children maintained their innocence, where they were viewed as innocent and victims, and also to safeguard social order, when children were perceived as threats to society.

From 1944, when the Conservative/Labour coalition government led by Churchill was in power, the state took increasing control and responsibility for funding

education, as it was perceived that education was the bedrock of the political aspiration of full employment (Jones, 2003). After the Second World War elementary schools became primary schools (Richards, 2006) and the school leaving age rose to 15 years (Jones, 2003). Primary, secondary and further education became established stages of a child's schooling trajectory (Richards, 2006). The responsibility for planning the education provision lay with the state funded Local Education Authorities (LEA) (Richards, 2006), but there was limited curriculum expectation from central or local government (Jones, 2003). Teachers had considerable control of the curriculum content and practices in the classroom, which meant children could experience a variety of teaching and learning experiences. The variety and 'diversity of social cultural and educational objectives' did not align with those of National Government' (Jones, 2003:71).

The decentralisation of provision, lack of central government control, diversity and progressive practices of the 1960s and 1970s were critiqued by government ministers. In his speech 'A rational debate based on the facts' (1976), at Ruskin College, Oxford, James Callaghan, the then Labour Prime Minister, questioned and challenged the diverse education system. He argued that the education system did not provide children with the rigour and necessary knowledge and skills needed for them to sustain a living standard and did not meet the expectations of industry (Callaghan, 1976). Over the next decade the state strengthened its control over the teaching practices in schools (Jones, 2003) by introducing a core curriculum, inspections and standard attainment tests (SATs). In 1989, the Conservative government, introduced the Primary Key Stage (KS) One and Two National Curriculum (NC) (Parliament.uk, 2009), the KS1 NC starting at the beginning of Year 1 when children are five years old. Regardless of which government has been in

power from this point to today teachers and the systems they use, such as curriculum, tests and inspections, have become increasingly controlled and monitored by central government.

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010 – 2015) on one hand continued to dominate school leaders' and teachers practices' with policies and systems, such as increased testing, rigorous inspection regimes and payment by results. On the other hand it advocated policies, such as Academies and Free Schools programmes, which aimed to provide teachers and parents with more power and autonomy 'to innovate and diversify' (Exley & Ball, 2011:97). The policies and systems that monitor teachers can limit the innovation to which the Conservative-led coalition aspired and some suggest such scrutiny can in fact 'demotivate and disempower teachers' (Francis & Mills, 2012:253).

There is also a strong underlying political belief that the 'real subjects and that 'the old methods are the best' when it comes to teaching, discipline and curriculum' (Exley & Ball, 2011: 97). This was reflected in the consultation for the revised NC where it stated 'English, mathematics and science are the building blocks of education. Improving our performance in these subjects will be essential if our country is to compete in the global economy' (DfE, 2013d:1.8). In this political context children are viewed as investments for the future and the task of schooling is to ensure the future workforce is equipped with the necessary skills for a thriving industrial sector so England can compete globally, whilst also safeguarding social order by reinforcing Englishness (Exley & Ball, 2011: Jones 2003). The school culture has generally constructed the child as a passive receiver and reproducer of knowledge and culture (Moss, 2014a), and the role of the teacher is to transmit the 'official knowledge' (Bernstein: 2000) and skills of the school curriculum.

1.2 Schools and Families

Not only has there been political involvement in shaping school provision but government policy has also shaped the relationship between parents and teachers. In Lady Plowden's report 'Children and their Primary Schools', it was noted that only in some primary schools were teachers 'influencing parents directly' (CACE, 1967:37). Acknowledging the positives of closer relationships between parents and teachers, she questioned 'Can more schools do so and on a bigger scale?' (CACE, 1967:37). The report recommended a minimum programme of activities that teachers should engage in when establishing relationships with parents. These included: welcome to school – for both children and parent as the child starts school; private meetings with teachers; visits to the home; open days; regular information for parents about children's progress and what happens at school; and annual written reports (CACE, 1967:40–44). Teachers were encouraged to share information about the children's experiences at school with parents.

Since the publication of the Plowden report there has been a further shift in government policy, emphasising that teachers should acknowledge the role of parents in their child's life and education. During the Labour administration (1997 – 2010), Lord Laming's review (2003) of Victoria Climbié's death reflected these changes, as he stated:

The needs of the child and his or her family are often inseparable. I am in no doubt that effective support for children and families cannot be achieved by a single agency acting alone. It depends on a number of agencies working well together. It is a multi-disciplinary task. (Laming, 2003:6)

Lord Laming's beliefs about the interconnectedness of the child with his/her family, and that professionals should work together, were the basis of his recommendations

in his report. The recommendations of the report had far-reaching implications at both government level and in practice. The *Every Child Matters* (ECM) (DfES: 2003) Green Paper was published in the same year as Lord Laming's review. The aim of ECM (DfES, 2003) was all children should be able to: Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Well-being (DfES, 2003:6). Integrated preventative services for children and families were central to ECM (DfES: 2003), and there was an expectation that all professionals had a duty to keep all children safe from maltreatment and abuse, 'particularly those who are vulnerable' (Fisher, 2008:200). Teachers were expected to be part of these multi-disciplinary teams to keep children safe.

School leaders were required to develop school provision to include support for children and their families. The remit for these extended schools was to provide childcare beyond school hours, health and social care services (DfES, 2003), which included family learning and parenting support (Fisher, 2008). Teachers and school leaders were encouraged to acknowledge children's and their families' experiences beyond school and to accept that these understandings should influence the provision they provided at school.

Changes were also made at a government level. In 2007 the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) was established. The title of the Department and such policies as ECM and extended schools reflected ministers' aspiration for joined up working between government departments and those working with children and families (Alexander, 2014; DfES, 2003). There was a rebranding of the DCSF when the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government came to power in 2010. It became the Department of Education (DfE). The title could be viewed as narrowing the focus of the Department to a primary concern with education, which is likely to

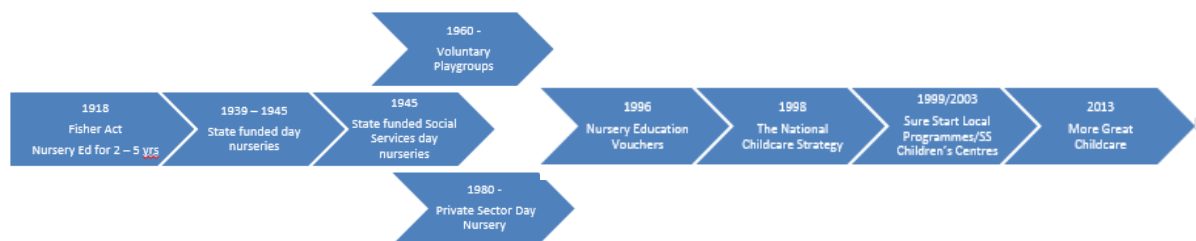
overlook the Department's other responsibilities for ECEC and children's social welfare (Moss, 2014b). In spite of these changes parents and families labelled as 'dysfunctional and chaotic' (Ball, 2013:201) remained the focus of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition policies, as an aim of the administration was to 'mend our broken society' (Ball, 2013:201). Parenting policies relating to school included parent/school contracts that were used to hold parents to account for their parenting and children's behaviour at school (Ball, 2013). Local Authorities (LA) and schools also had legal powers to enforce children's school attendance; these included: School Attendance Orders; Parenting Orders; penalties; systems to prosecute parents (Gov, 2015).

Successive governments have introduced policies to encourage parental partnership and involvement, as there is generally held belief that parental involvement in their children's education has a positive influence on the children's educational outcomes (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall & Montgomery, 2013). The discussion above illustrates some constructs of parents held by those in government. Parents can be constructed as 'dysfunctional and chaotic' (Ball, 2013:201), requiring intervention, as consumers of their children's education 'in an educational marketplace' (Exley & Ball, 2011:97); or as partners with teachers since together they are innovators in shaping the practices and systems of their school (Ball, 2013). The perceptions that teachers and parents have of each other are likely to influence the relationships that they have with each other.

1.3 Nursery Schools and Diverse ECEC provision

In the past primary education has been described as the Cinderella of the public education sector (Richards, 2006). Prior to 1997 the ECEC sector had been the

even poorer relation in England, as there had been no consistent funding or strategic planning. This was despite recommendations from various government Acts and advisory groups, such as The Fisher Act (1918) and The Plowden Report (1967), to develop nursery education for all children between two and five years old. Inconsistent funding, and the generally held belief in society that young children are the responsibility of the family, hampered the development of universal state ECEC provision for young children. The provision that had been established for young children was variable and fragmented. Moss (2006) argues providers came from a range of backgrounds and each had different aims and expectations. Figure 2 highlights some of the key points in the ECEC trajectory from the recommendations of nursery schools to the provision of today. Then follows further discussion about how these key points have shaped ECEC provision in England.



1.3 Figure 2: Early Childhood Education and Care provision in England

Whilst CSE was established during the 1870 – 1880s it was not until the Fisher Act of 1918 that Local Education Authorities (LEA) were given:

...the power to make arrangements as may be approved by the Board of Education for a) supplying or aiding the supply of nursery schools for children over two and under-five years of age whose home conditions are such that attendance at such a school is necessary or

desirable for their healthy physical and mental development (BAECE archives, cited Penn, 2009: 109)

LEAs were expected to strategically plan for nursery school provision for children between two and five years old. Despite this expectation there was not an expansion of nursery provision. By 1929 there were only 29 nursery schools with approximately 1500 children attending them (Woodhead, 1989). Nursery school provision was not for all children but for children whose home life did not promote their healthy development.

The Second World War (1939 – 1945) led to an expansion of state run day nurseries. The purpose of these was to care for children while their mothers worked. Soon after the war many day nurseries were closed, as mothers returned to the home to care for their children (Moss, 2006; Penn, 2009). The day nurseries that remained open changed the focus of the provision from providing day care to a service for those children and families requiring support (Moss, 2006). These settings were funded and regulated by the Department of Health (DoH) (Moss, 2006) and had different requirements and procedures to nursery schools, which were regulated by national and local government education departments.

Some people's attitudes and beliefs about children's care and education had been changing during the war. In the Conservative's Education White Paper of 1943 it was stated 'even when children come from good homes they can derive much benefit, both educational and physical, from attendance at a nursery school' (Board of Education, 1943:6). It was also specified in this paper that 'there must be a sufficient supply of nursery schools' (Board of Education, 1943:1). Despite this recommendation the recession and growth in birth rates did not lead to the development of provision for the youngest children. Instead, as already discussed

in Section 1, the school leaving age rose and the political focus remained with the primary and secondary schools (Woodhead, 1989).

It was the voluntary sector that filled the gap in provision for the youngest children. During the 1960s and 1970s many mothers, realising the benefits for their children of socialising and playing with others before starting school, set up voluntary playgroups (Penn, 2009). Like nursery schools, playgroup sessions were generally for half the day during term time. The relationship between the voluntary playgroup sector (later called pre-school playgroups) and the maintained nursery sector was uneasy, as there were concerns that the growth in the voluntary sector playgroups could weaken the case for governments to commit to expanding nursery education (Penn, 2009). Society's persistent view of the role of mothers also contributed to the limited expansion of nursery education; in the 1960s and 1970s there still was criticism if mothers of young children worked (Moss, 2006). For those mothers that did work childminders were the principle providers of childcare (Moss, 2006).

Gradually society's attitudes towards working mothers changed. To meet the childcare requirements of working parents there was an expansion in the private sector ECEC provision during the 1980s and 1990s (Moss, 2006). Private day-nurseries and childminders shared the role of providing all year round, full day care for babies and young children whilst parents worked. By now there was a range of provision used by children and families, which included maintained nursery schools/classes, social service nurseries, voluntary sector playgroups, childminders and private day nurseries. Each had differing expectations and ideologies that underpinned their practices. This diverse ECEC provision was the foundation for the subsequent growth in provision for the youngest children. From the mid-1990s the ECEC sector moved from the periphery of government policy to the centre.

This turning point happened in 1996 when the Conservative Government piloted, in four LAs, Nursery Education Vouchers to fund education for all four year olds. The vouchers only lasted for a short period. When New Labour came to power, in 1997, they abolished the vouchers (Ball, 2013). A year after coming to power, New Labour published *The National Childcare Strategy Green Paper: Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfEE, 1998). In the strategy document ministers outlined three main aims of the Labour government, which were to raise the quality of child-care provision, whilst ensuring provision was accessible and affordable (Harker, 2003). At a local level Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP) were established and were responsible for planning ECEC provision and implementing the National Childcare Strategy (Moss, 2014b). In Labour's 2004 Comprehensive Spending Review Gordon Brown shared his government's vision that the '21st century should be marked by the introduction of pre-school provision for the under-fives and childcare available to all' (Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP Chancellor of the Exchequer, 2004). The investment to fund the government's vision of pre-school education for all children was to be a mixture of private fees and state funding (Ball, 2013).

New Labour also implemented their flagship policy Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP). Established in 1999, SSLPs provided education, health and parenting support services in the most deprived communities. This policy focused on developing and strengthening families and communities by promoting individuals' agency, impacting on the children's and families' life chances (DCSF, 2008a). There was an expectation that the communities would lead the development of the programmes. Families and ECEC practitioners had much autonomy during this period when developing services for children and their families (Lewis, 2011). In

2003, SSLPs became Sure Start Children's Centres (SSCC). The purpose of SSCCs differed from SSLPs. An aim of SSCCs was to integrate care and education 'to promote adult employment and to address the issue of workless families' (Lewis, 2011:75). The ambition of the government was to establish a Sure Start Children's Centre in every community by 2010, a total of 3,500 (Moss, 2014b). Also, during this period, there was an extension in funding for three year olds; three and four year old children were entitled to 15 hours early education funding in an ECEC setting (Smith, 2012).

In 2010 the recently elected Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government extended this funding to include two-year-old children from the lowest socioeconomic group (Gov.UK, 2013b). The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition also published *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013b), which outlined plans for the ECEC sector. In this document school leaders who were already providing ECEC provision (nursery education) for children who were three years old were encouraged to provide education for children under three (DfE, 2013b). There were also changes in SSCC services, as these were reorganised and restructured (Sylva et al., 2015). This included a refocusing of the work to families with babies and toddlers from 'conception to age two' (All Party Parliamentary Sure Start Group 2013:7) and 'from targeting poor neighbourhoods to targeting families in greatest need' (Sylva et al., 2015:8). The reorganisation and refocusing of SSCC services resulted in a reduction in the number of SSCCs. Between April 2010 and November 2012 401 CCs (11%) closed or merged (Moss, 2014b).

1.4 ECEC Ethos, Curriculum and Monitoring

Although ECEC provision can appear to be fragmented, the practices of many ECEC practitioners can be tracked back to the philosophies of the period of the Enlightenment (Brooker, 2005). The practices of the Early Education pioneers and the activists such as Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827), Froebel (1752 – 1852), Montessori (1869 – 1952), McMillan (1860-1931) and Isaacs (1885 – 1948) grew out of these philosophies, which viewed the child as ‘natural and basically innocent’ (Brooker, 2005:118). The pioneers advocated practices which promoted self-directed uninterrupted play and viewed learning as a holistic process in which all aspects of children’s development is fostered (Bruce, 1997). The pioneers also promoted opportunities for children to learn in both indoor and outdoor environments and held the belief that ECEC practitioners work in partnerships with parents (Bilton, 2010; OECD, 2006). Bruce (1997) has drawn together the work of the Early Education pioneers and identified common themes and articulated these into principles which have guided, and continue to guide, many ECEC practitioners’ practices. Wood and Attfield (2005) agree that there are general consistencies in the pioneers’ beliefs and that these, with theory and research, can shape the guiding principles of ECEC curriculum (Wood & Attfield, 2005). They caution against an overly simplistic approach, as each of the pioneers was located in different historical, social and cultural contexts (Wood & Attfield 2005). The historical context in which the pioneer was situated would have shaped his/her beliefs about children, learning, adults’ roles, and the purpose of the provision that they were providing for young children. Therefore, there are likely to be differences as well as similarities in their beliefs about the provision for young children.

There were reflections of the pioneers’ views of the child and associated practices in the Plowden Report, which stated that ‘at the heart of the educational process

lies the child' (CACE, 1967). Such a recommendation validated the progressive practices of some nursery and infant schools at that time. Robin Alexander has identified that since the publication of the report two other accounts of the report have evolved. The terms he uses for the three versions are 'Plowden as published, Plowden as sanctified; Plowden as demonised' (Alexander, 2009: 2). 'Plowden as published' refers to the text that was actually written. 'Plowden as sanctified' emerged from proponents of progressive practices, who had not read the report but who drew upon hearsay of others (Alexander, 2009). Often the words and practices of the second version were not reflected in 'Plowden as published', which led to the second version being a distorted version of the original (Alexander, 2009). Finally, there were those that demonised the report and claimed that the apparent progressive practices in the published version had led to the demise of education and the empire (Alexander, 2009; Jones, 2002). As discussed in Section 1.1 of this chapter, it was at this time that politicians became involved in the planning of the provision and curriculum for children over 5 years. In some areas Infant and Junior schools amalgamated to become Primary schools and the KS1 and KS2 NC were introduced (Jones, 2002). Whilst the infant school practices have changed due to this political involvement there has been little change to the ECEC ethos (Brooker, 2005).

An explanation as to why these practices have not evolved is that, prior to 1996, the ECEC sector escaped political gaze and regulation (Abbott & Langston, 2005). Since 1996, in addition to state funding of the ECEC sector, successive governments have introduced ECEC curricula and systems to monitor children's learning and development. Figure 3 tracks the development of an ECEC curriculum since the introduction of public funding.



1.4 Figure 3 Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum

ECEC providers who were in receipt of the Conservative government Nursery Education Vouchers were expected to work towards the children’s attainment of the *Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning on Entering Compulsory Education* (DLOs) (DfEE, 1996) and were also inspected by Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services Learning and Skills (OfSTED) (Young-Ihm, 2002). In 1999, the Labour administration replaced the DLOs with the *Early Learning Goals* (ELGs) and in 2000 the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS) (DfEE, 2000) was introduced. The CGFS was to support those who were working with children between three and five years old. In 2002, the non-statutory *Birth to Three Matters Framework* (SureStart, 2002) was introduced for those working with babies and very young children. Five years later in 2007, the CGFS, the *Birth to Three Framework* and the *Child-care Standards* were amalgamated to create the *Early Years Foundation Stage Framework* (EYFS) (DCSF, 2007). The EYFS (DCSF, 2007) set the requirements for all ECEC practitioners who were in receipt of early years funding and providing ECEC for children from birth to 5 years old. The aim of the framework was ‘to help young children achieve the five ECM outcomes’ (DfES, 2003:6). Also in 2003, the *Early Years Foundation Stage Profile* (EYFSP) (STA, 2013) was introduced. At the end of the EYFS, which is the end of the reception year, teachers were expected to carry out summative assessments of children’s learning. These assessments were to enable government, LAs and schools to monitor the performance of children and also support teachers to plan for children’s learning in Year 1 (STA, 2013). The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition

government revised the EYFS in 2012. The purpose of the EYFS changed from supporting children to achieve the five ECM outcomes to ensuring that children are in a state of school readiness when they start school.

1.5 'Readiness' and the 'Schoolification' of ECEC Provision

The inclusion of the term school readiness in the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition's revised EYFS (DfE, 2012a) and of the impact indicator, 'Readiness to progress to next stage of schooling (early years into primary, primary into secondary)' (DfE, 2010a:22) in the government's business plan, would suggest that politicians believe many children are not ready for school when they start and older children are not ready for the next phase of their education. These documents can reinforce the view that schooling is a hierarchical system where children move from the bottom (ECEC) to the top (secondary school and beyond). The preparation of children for each phase is straightforward, as children are assumed to follow a predetermined, uniform linear path of development from bottom to top (Moss, 2013).

From this political perspective the primary purpose of ECEC provision is to prepare children to be ready for school (Moss, 2013). Moss (2013:9) terms the relationship between ECEC and school as the 'readiness relationship'. This relationship positions the ECEC practices and associated knowledge at the bottom of the 'epistemological hierarchy' (Urban, 2008:141). School readiness is then associated with the skills, knowledge and behaviours of school (Brooker, 2008; OECD, 2001; 2006). The flow of communication of what is expected of the children is generally in one direction, from the top to the bottom (Moss, 2013). This can lead to the schoolification (OECD, 2006) of ECEC provision, as primary school practices seep downwards into ECEC provision. The Starting Strong (OECD, 2006) document

provides an example of schoolification as ‘young children spending much of their time indoors, doing their letters and numbers in preparation for school’ (OECD, 2006:62). Some have described schoolification as the ECEC sector being colonised by formal schooling (Dahlberg, 2013). This can make it difficult for ECEC practitioners to resist the dominant political readiness discourse.

1.6 School Starting Age

Since the beginning of compulsory schooling, children do not reach compulsory school age until the first day of the term after their fifth birthday (DfE, 2014). The recent education funding for two-year-old children and the changes to the school OfSTED registration process can suggest younger children are now starting school sooner than in the past, but throughout history younger children have always been found at school (Hohmann & Savage, 2004). Often this was due to the limited ECEC provision. When compulsory school was introduced in 1880 children under five years often joined their older siblings at school, as there was no one to look after them in the home; parents were at work and older siblings were at school or at work. There were concerns that the youngest children were being subjected to an inappropriate curriculum in overcrowded and unsuitable conditions that did not meet the children’s physical and emotional needs (Bilton, 2010; Penn, 2009). The unsuitable teaching methods and conditions were highlighted in a report by a group of school inspectors from the Board of Education in 1905 (Bilton, 2010). This report resulted in those children below the compulsory starting age being removed from schools (Young-Ihm, 2002; Penn, 2009).

More recently it has become commonplace for four year old children to attend school reception classes (Hohmann & Savage, 2004; Rogers & Rose, 2007;

Woodhead, 1989). By the 1960s, many children started school the term before their fifth birthday (Woodhead, 1989). At his time there were three points during the academic year when children could start school; children turning five in the Autumn term started in September, those turning five in the Spring term started in January and finally those turning five in the Summer term started at the beginning of this term (Rogers & Rose, 2007). The classes the children entered were called reception class (Hohmann & Savage, 2004). There were concerns that the youngest children in the year group were missing out as they had less time in these classes. The Plowden (1967) report recommended 'It is better to have one intake a year to infant schools or classes than three' (CACE, 1967:138). This recommendation was based upon the understanding that children would be in environments guided by the nursery ethos and that there was the option for part time attendance (CACE, 1967).

During the next two decades, there was a decline in the birth rate, which led to falling rolls at school and concerns over school closures and teachers losing employment. These concerns resulted in younger children starting school as there were space and teachers available in schools (Hohmann & Savage, 2004). By 1986 there were four distinct admission policies in operation:

- Statutory starting age – the term after the child is five
- Three intakes as year– Autumn, Spring and Summer, the child joins the reception class at the beginning of the term he/she has their fifth birthday
- Two intakes a year, Autumn and Spring, when the child is 4 ½ years old
- Single entry point – the September after the child's fourth birthday
(Daniels et al., 1995 cited by Rogers & Rose, 2007:49)

Labour government figures recorded in 2005 showed that 100% of four years olds were attending an educational setting and 62% of these were attending reception

classes (Rogers & Rose, 2007). In 2009, Rose's Review of the Primary Curriculum stated: 'The preferred pattern of entry to reception classes should be the September immediately following a child's fourth birthday' (Rose, 2009:22). The justification for a single point of entry was 'to give parents a greater choice, and to achieve a better match of provision to need in the Reception Year' (Rose, 2009: 92). Although not statutory, since Rose's recommendation children have generally started the school's reception year in the September after their fourth birthday. Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government reports recorded in 2010 that '89% of four to five year old admissions to maintained school reception classes took place in September, 10% in January, and 1% in April' (DfE, 2010b:4). Although the statutory school starting age has remained unchanged since the beginning of compulsory schooling there has been a nudging down of the actual school starting age.

1.7 National and Local School Admission Policies

The national trends discussed above are reflected in the information shared with parents by Southward LA²,

In Southward LA there is only one point of entry for children due to start or transfer school. This takes place each September. Children starting school for the first time, are normally expected to join in the September following their fourth birthday (Southward Local Authority 2013a:5)

This information is given to parents at the beginning of the application process when applying for their children's school place.

National policies in relation to the allocation of school places have also changed in recent years; these then influence local admission policies and the application process. Prior to the mid-1990s children were allocated a school place in their local catchment area. However, the principle of 'parental choice' that underpins many education policies also now guides the admission systems and processes (Gibbons & Machin, 2006). In line with national expectations Southward LA parents were given the choice to name three schools they would like their child to attend: number one being the preferred choice, number two being their second choice and number three being their third and final choice (Southward LA, 2013a: DfE, 2012b). Parents were expected to submit the school application form, citing their preferred choices, by the 15th January 2013 (Southward LA, 2013a). The information sent to parents also explained that schools are provided with an 'Admission Number³' (AN). The AN 'indicates the maximum number of places available in the year group' (Southward LA 2013a:6). Parental choice can be limited if they have chosen three

² Southward LA is a pseudonym for the county where the research took place.

³ Admission numbers are allocated by the Department of Education. These are based upon national guidelines for class sizes (DfE, 2012b: 8).

schools beyond their catchment and these schools are full. In such situations only then will parents be offered a place for their child at a school, which was not one of their preferred choices. Usually the place will be at the catchment school. Catchment schools are defined as those that are within 'two miles walking distance from home for children under eight years' (Southward LA, 2013a:6). If parents are not satisfied with the school their child has been allocated, there is an appeals process should they want to appeal against the decision.

Whilst there is the aspiration for parents to have choice which school their child attends, parents who have greater choice are those who have the financial resources to move closer to their chosen school or to travel to the school (Gibbons & Machin, 2006). It is not only parents' financial resources that increase their choices but also their social and cultural capital. Generally middle class parents' social and cultural capital is more valued in the education system (Brooker, 2002). Ball (2013) argues these parents' cultural capital, social resources and strategies flourish in choice systems. Thus they are more likely to be successful at playing the admission systems so securing their preferred choice of school for their child. Often working class parents' social and cultural capital is less valued in the school system (Ball, 2013). Ball (2013) also argues these parents are less likely to use their social and cultural capital to good effect. Therefore these parents are less likely to secure their child's place at their chosen school. Their choices are further limited if they are constrained by practical issues such as a lack of transport and financial resources.

1.8 Starting School

Starting school can be an exciting time for children (Brooker, 2008; Arnold et al, 2007). The transition from ECEC setting to school is a rite of passage for them.

Starting school and becoming a school pupil is one of the 'landmarks in the process of growing up' (Brooker, 2008:27). Parents generally share their children's enthusiasm and want their children to adjust quickly to school life and for them to succeed at school (Whalley, 2001).

Despite children's excitement and the positive intentions of parents, starting school can be a difficult time for both children and parents. Among the children who are more likely to find starting school difficult are those whose family and local community's culture and knowledge are not reflected in the school culture, such as working class children (Ball, 2013; Bernstein, 2000; Brooker, 2008). If children are viewed as not progressing in their school learning soon after they start, it can appear to teachers that children were not ready for school (WaveTrust, 2013). It is the political view that 'good parenting' contributes to children's state of readiness for school (DfE, 2012a:2). Such views can position the parents whose children are regarded as not ready for school, as not good parents who require support to prepare their children to be ready for school (Field, 2010). As parents and ECEC practitioners share the task of preparing children to be ready for school, blame can also be apportioned to ECEC practitioners if children appear not ready for school. This was the situation in the context that I had worked, which I discussed in the introduction.

The emphasis in the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government policy on children's achievement of school readiness can be viewed as easing the transition to school, and guaranteeing that children will continue their academic learning in the next stage of their education (DfE, 2012a). The preparation and children's readiness to start school is only a part of the transition. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) research extends the transition by acknowledging children's adjustment to

school as part of the process. They also make the assertion that the relationships between those preparing and supporting children during the transition are significant in how children adjust to school.

1.9 Systems to Support Children's Transition to School

At a local level the awareness that the transition to school is a key point in a child's education trajectory led to those in strategic positions in Southward LA planning policies to support this process. For example, Southward LA implemented systems to support children's transition to the reception class by encouraging information sharing between parents, ECEC practitioners and reception teachers. ECEC practitioners were expected to complete '*A Unique Child Early Years Foundation Stage Learning and Development Summary*' (Southward LA, 2012) for each child. The non-statutory '*Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage*' (Early Education, 2012) or '*Early Years Outcomes*' (DfE, 2013a) documents could be used by ECEC practitioners as guidance when completing their summary of children's learning and development. Both guidance documents set out the expected levels of development for children at specific ages and the '*Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage*' (Early Education, 2012) describes examples of children's behaviour for each stage of their development. The expected levels of development of children stated in the guidance documents could offer a common language for ECEC practitioners and teachers when they discuss children's stages of learning and development.

The LA also introduced School Entry Plan (SEP) meetings, which are obligatory for parents, teachers, ECEC practitioners and other practitioners who are supporting children with an 'additional need'. The expectation is that parents, teachers, ECEC

practitioners and other practitioners support the child meet and share information and plan the children's transitions. The LA documentation outlines the SEP as:

The School Entry Plan is an opportunity for staff to welcome a child and family to their new school.

It is a chance for them to:

- listen to the parents' concerns,
- demonstrate the positive inclusive practice that can be offered and
- jointly anticipate and solve problems

(Southward LA 2013b:4)

Both systems discussed above provide parents and ECEC practitioners with opportunities to share information, about the children and their experiences with them prior to the children starting the reception class, with the teacher. This information can then be used to plan the transition and children's learning at school.

1.10 Identifying the Research Focus

Motivated by the awareness of changing relationships, after changes in policy expectations, between the school teachers and ECEC practitioners and an awareness that parents experienced different relationships with teachers compared with ECEC teachers and practitioners (Shields, 2009), I designed a case study. The case study aimed to gain insights into parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs and relationships during children's transition to school. The case study comprised of two cases in one LA. The LA is referred to as 'Southward LA' and the towns are referred to as 'Castleton' and 'Townmouth'. Participants are introduced in Chapter 4, Section 4.3. Participants chose pseudonyms for themselves. The name of the LA, the towns and participants have been changed to work towards anonymity. Central to the research aim was a desire to create an opportunity for the participants to share their experiences and understandings with each other with

a view to them gaining insights into the other group members' perspectives and experiences.

1.11 Thesis Structure

In chapter two Meisels' (1999) model of 'readiness' and Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta's (2000) model of 'transition' are discussed. This chapter aligns Meisels' and Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's perspectives of readiness and transition to create the model: 'The Relational Transition to School'. Following this, there is a discussion about the current English ECEC policy context and how ECEC policy can influence the relationships and interactions between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers. The model 'The Relational Transition to School' is further developed in light of this discussion. This model is my contribution to the existing understanding of the transition to school.

Chapter three builds on Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) assertion that the relationships and interactions between those supporting and preparing children during the transition to school can either enhance or limit the children's adjustment to school. Relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers are discussed further. There is a consideration of teachers' and ECEC practitioners' professional backgrounds and the personal heritages of parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers. These adults will draw upon their personal and professional beliefs during the transition and also when establishing relationships and interacting with each other.

Just as participants draw upon their life experiences to prepare and support children during the transition, I, as a researcher, have drawn upon my experiences when designing the research. In chapter four these experiences are discussed and

provide justifications for my decisions in the design of the research. Ethical considerations are examined, as well as the construction of the conceptual tool 'The Relational Transition to School', used for analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion highlighting the strengths and limitations of the research design.

The findings presented in chapter five discuss parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs about school readiness and how they prepared children to be ready for school. In chapters six to nine, findings about the qualities of the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers throughout the transition process are presented. Each chapter focuses on one of four phases during the transition. Chapter Six, focuses on Phase 1 of the transition which is during the autumn and spring term prior to children starting in the reception class; Chapter Seven, focuses on Phase 2, which is during the summer term before children start in the reception class; Chapter Eight, focuses on Phase 3, which is during the autumn term after the children have moved to the reception class, and finally Chapter Nine, focuses on Phase 4, , which is during the spring and summer term before the move to the KS1 NC in Year 1. Chapter ten returns to the aims of the study to discuss the findings of the research about the relationships and interactions between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers during the transition process. The conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School' is discussed and the insights provided by this model of these relationships and understandings of the children starting school are considered. The limitations of the study are deliberated and areas for future research propose.

Chapter 2 – The Transition to School

2 Introduction

In the previous chapter the discussion highlighted that the readiness discourse underpins many of the English education policies, and that the purpose of the ECEC sector is seen as to ensure children's school readiness. Globally there has been a long history of politicians, academics, teachers and ECEC practitioners debating the term readiness (Arnold et al, 2006; Kagan & Rigby, 2003; Kagan, 2007). This was particularly so in America when members of the National Educational Goal Panel set the first national goal as "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (National Educational Goals Panel, 1991: vi). Motivated by the political focus on children's school readiness at the transition from kindergarten⁴ to school, American academics Meisels (1999) and Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) reviewed a range of US policy texts, research and literature. This process led to Meisels (1999) creating a model of readiness and Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) a model of the transition to school. Both models identified four theoretical perspectives associated with each concept. After a discussion of these academics' work, I propose a model of the transition to school which, instead of viewing readiness and adjustment as separate phenomena, includes both. This model creates four further perspectives on the transition to school. This is then followed by an analysis of English ECEC policy. First, I discuss Meisels' (1999) work.

⁴ In the USA children who attend Kindergarten are 5 years old. It is not compulsory to attend Kindergarten. Children start compulsory school the Autumn after they are 6 years old (AmericanCulturalAssumption 2014)

2.1 Perspectives of “Readiness” and “Transition”

The reference to ‘school ready children’ in American policy in the early 1990s was not the first. There has been a long history in the US, where ‘readiness’ has been associated with starting school. As long ago as the 1920s, the US progressive schools tested children’s ‘reading readiness’ (May & Campbell, 1981:131) to determine if they were ready for school. During the 1960s, the US Head Start Programme was established; an aim of the programme was to ensure children’s school readiness (Kagan & Rigby, 2003). Meisels’ rationale to review the literature was to make sense of assessments associated with readiness. He identified four dominant theoretical perspectives on readiness. Each perspective has a different view of how children become ready and different expectations of what skills, knowledge and behaviours are to be assessed. The perspectives are: Idealist/Nativist, Empiricist/Environmental, Social Constructivist, and Interactionist (Meisels, 1999:46). These are described in Table 1.

| Theoretical perspective | Ready for what? | Features that Determine Readiness | Assessment |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Idealist/Nativist | Ready to learn school skills, knowledge and behaviours | Internal child development | Universal assessments of predictable stages of development |
| Empiricist/Environmental | Ready for school | Environment shapes child | Universal assessments of skills, knowledge and behaviours for school |
| Social Constructivist | 'What children are ready for' is locally constructed | Communities' views, values, dispositions, expectations | A methodology constructed at a local level to provide information about the collective status of the cohort of children entering school |
| Interactionist | Readiness for learning | Readiness is a product shaped by the skills and experiences of the child and the goals of teacher and community | Assessment happens over time in context |

2.1 Table 1: Meisels (1999) Theoretical Perspectives of Readiness

The Idealist/Nativist perspective positions “readiness to learn” within the child. Each child’s innate biological pattern, which regulates cognitive structures and creates the social and emotional maturity, determines when he/she will become ready to learn the skills, knowledge and behaviours for school. The child’s developmental stages in his/her physical, cognitive, social and emotional development are

measured by a standardised assessment tool. Each developmental stage is usually around an average age. Until the child has achieved the expected level of development for his/her age, he/she is not ready to undertake the tasks associated with the next stage of development (Kagan & Rigby, 2003). If the child does not reach the expected developmental stage at the appropriate age he/she can be described as being immature and not ready for school learning. The Empiricist/Environmental perspective positions the influences that shape the child's "readiness for school" beyond the child. The environment and those around the child are responsible for shaping the child's behaviours to be ready for school and school learning. Those preparing children look first for the skills, knowledge and behaviours, that are prerequisites for learning at school. To assess these a standardised assessment is used. If a gap is identified, then an intervention is put in place to remedy the problem.

In Table 1 the latter two perspectives shift the focus from just the child and his/her immediate environment to the social-cultural context in which the child, members of the community and school are situated. The Social Constructivist perspective of readiness prioritises the views of the local community members when defining what readiness is, how it is to be assessed and what assessment tool is to be used. Love, Aber and Brooks-Gunn (1994, cited in Meisels, 1999:55) recommend 'community aggregated measures of readiness'. Through the process of considering and measuring community resources, community members construct a definition of readiness based on their social and cultural values, beliefs and understandings (Meisels, 1999). A challenge for such a process is ensuring that all group members' understandings are heard and contribute to the process of measuring and defining readiness, but also ensuring that the ways of deciding the measures and processes

of assessment are manageable and not too cumbersome. The different values, beliefs and understandings of each geographical community make comparisons between communities difficult.

Finally, the Interactionist perspective looks to the interactions between the child and the school environment. The child's genes, maturation, his/her previous cultural experiences are all acknowledged as part of the process. Readiness is created during the interactions between the child and the expectations of the teacher, school and community (Meisels, 1999:57). This perspective acknowledges the internal influences of the child and external influences on the child, this perspective does not position readiness solely within the child or the curriculum. Instead it views the child as an active agent in the process of constructing readiness with the teacher (Meisels, 1999). Assessment of readiness is 'complex, multidimensional and process orientated' (Graue, 2006:51), as 'readiness is a product of a set of educational decisions' (Meisels, 1999:57). Readiness can only be assessed in context and over time, as the child is in a constant state of readiness to learn (Meisels, 1999).

Meisels' work provides a useful framework to gain insights into the different perspectives of readiness and the associated assessments, but children's readiness is only part of a transition to school. Ecology theories define a transition as when a person's situation 'is altered as a result of a change in role, setting or both' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:26). During the transition to school children learn and adjust to the expectations of being a school pupil and how to become an active participant at school. This is a period of 'growth, change and transformation' (Vogler et al, 2008:5). As with the concept of readiness, there are various perspectives upon the concept of transition (Vogler et al 2008; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta 2000).

Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta were also motivated to review literature but their focus was on the transition to school. When reviewing literature associated with the transition from Kindergarten to school, Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta used various versions of ecological system theories, such as Bronfenbrenner & Morris, (1998), Pianta & Walsh, (1996) Sameroff, (1995), as tools to examine the literature (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000:492). They identified four perspectives on transitions that were regularly referred to in this literature. These are: Child Effects, Direct Effects, Indirect Effects and The Ecological and Dynamic. Table 2 outlines the perspectives and key features of each.

| Transition | | | | |
|----------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Theoretical perspective | Features that Determine Adjustment | Interactions | Relationships | Time/ Intervention |
| Child Effects | Child characteristics | Child interacts with environment | Child alone | Time needed for child to mature |
| Direct Effects | The environment (home learning environment/ parenting, ECEC setting and classroom environment) | The environment shapes the child | Relationships between child and those she/he interacts with - family, pupils, community and teachers | Interventions put in place for those at risk of not achieving academically |
| Indirect Effects | The relationships between those in the home/school/ community supporting the child | Views of each other will affect interactions, the links and relationships | Relationships between those in the home/school/ community enable links to be constructed between them | Relationships and interactions are static |
| The Ecological and Dynamic | Dynamic qualities of the transition ecology | As above but these will change and evolve during the transition | Focuses on the formation of relationships over time | Relationships change over time |

2.1 Table 2: Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (2000) Theoretical Perspectives of Transitions

The Child Effects perspective locates the factors that influence the child's adjustment to school within the child. It is the child's characteristics that affect his/her adjustment to school. If the child does not adjust, time is provided for him/her to mature and acclimatise to the new environment. The Direct Effects perspective recognises that the child has an effect on those in the home, school and community,

but his/her adjustment to school is primarily shaped by the settings (home, community and school) in which the child participates. The transition is viewed as happening over a short period of time. If the child does not adjust to school life and learning, the problems that arise are not associated with the transition, but instead the child will be viewed as having an academic or behavioural problem and is in need of intervention to remedy the problems.

The Indirect Effects perspective takes into consideration not only the relationships between the child and those in the school, home and community but also the relationships between those in each of the settings. For instance, how families, teachers and ECEC practitioners perceive each other will not only influence the nature of their interactions but also the relationships that are established between them, and subsequently the manner of the child's adjustment to school. A limitation of this perspective is that these relationships are seen as static, which does not entertain the possibility for the groups to change perceptions of each other or their interactions with each other during the transition.

Finally, the Ecological and Dynamic perspective does recognise that the relationships between teachers, family, peers and community will change over time during children's transitions and that a transition is a dynamic process. These relationships have historic origins, as adults have established relationships with teachers when they were pupils. Throughout the transition process the perceptions of each other will evolve. Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (2000:492) argue that relationships will not only 'support or challenge' the child's adjustment to school but will also influence his/her ensuing relationship with school. After examination of the literature, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) recommended that family-school

linkages should not only be considered as causal to the child's adjustment to and success at school but relationships are also an 'outcome' of the transition.

Rimm-Kuaffman and Pianta's (2000) work provides useful insights into the various perspectives of transition. The consideration of their model highlights that, like a child's readiness, his/her adjustment is part of the transition to school. Aligning the models of readiness and transition cited by Meisels and by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta into a coherent model is not straightforward, but a comparison illuminates commonalities between the concepts. The alignment also affords the possibility of viewing a transition in which readiness and adjustment are two phases of the process.

2.2 Aligning the Models of Readiness and Transition

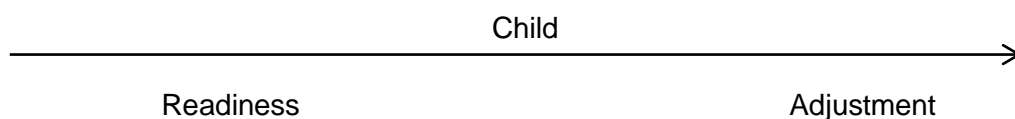
Following are four theoretical perspectives upon the Transition to School in which both readiness and adjustment are included: The Transition to School: development within the child, The Environmental Transition to School, Static Relationships during the Transition to School, and The Relational Transition to School. Another development of this model is the relationships around the child. As parents and families⁵, ECEC practitioners and teachers all share the task of preparing and supporting children during the transition, it is these relationships that are represented in the latter three perspectives. Also in the latter three perspectives the circle around the child, parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers represents the neighbourhood in which the home, ECEC setting and school are situated. The transition continuum (see Figures 4, 5 and 6), which is the line with the arrow,

⁵ I acknowledge the role of the extended family during the transition. When I refer to parents during this thesis I am also referring to the extended family.

represents the phases of the transition. In Figure 7, the representation of the phases has been developed so that 'The Relational Transition to School' can be developed further. These phases are the preparation for the move to school, the time when the child is in the state of readiness for the move to school and finally a phase in which the child adjusts to school. Where readiness and adjustment are situated on the transition continuum depends on the theoretical perspective.

Perspective 1

The Idealist/Nativist perspective of readiness and the Child Effects perspective of transition both situate the child's readiness for, and adjustment to, school within the child (Meisels, 1999; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). A child's internal developmental pathway and his/her characteristics affect when he/she is in the state of readiness and when he/she adjusts to school. In Figure 4 a child's readiness and adjustment is unique to them.

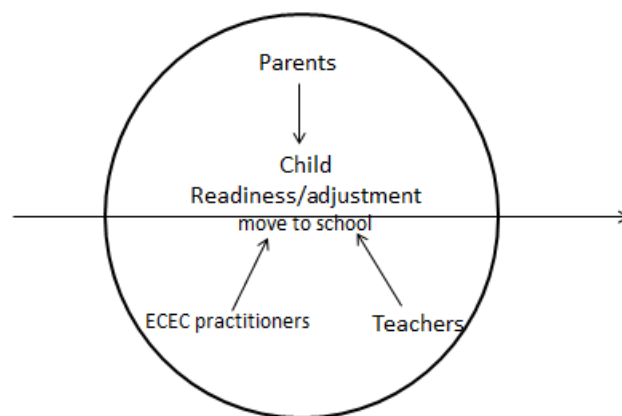


2.2 Figure 4: Transition to School: Development within the Child

During the transition the child's innate characteristics and development will influence the time frame during which the child will enter the state of readiness and will complete his/her adjustment to school. The child's maturation will govern where readiness and adjustment are situated on the continuum.

Perspective 2

The Empiricist/Environmental perspective on readiness (Meisels, 1999) and the Direct Effects perspective on transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) both recognise that the immediate environment prepares the child to be in the state of readiness and to adjust to school. These influences are represented in Figure 5.

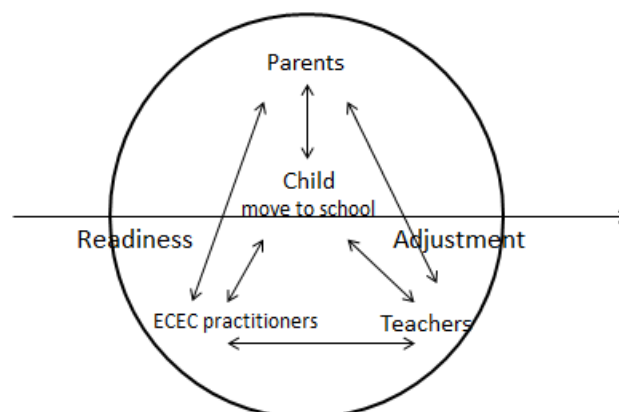


2.2 Figure 5: The Environmental Transition to School

From this perspective it is the environmental factors that shape the child's transition to school. When the child is assessed as being in the state of readiness for school and school learning he/she will be capable of adjusting to school learning and the school environment. Readiness and adjustment are placed close together on the transition continuum, as adjustment to school happens soon after the move. If after the move a gap is noted in the child's behaviour, learning or development, interventions are put in place to fill the gap. Interventions can include nurture groups, reading intervention schemes, etc. These gaps are not as a result of the transition, as the child had been assessed as ready for school and school learning beforehand.

Perspective 3

The Social Constructivist perspective on readiness (Meisels, 1999) and the Indirect Effects perspective (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) make reference to the importance of the relationships and interactions between the people around the children. A difference between these perspectives is that the Social Constructivist definition of children's readiness, assessment of readiness and what they are being prepared for are decided by the local community members (Love, Aber and Brooks-Gunn, 1994:2 cited in Meisels, 1999:55). Although children are part of the community, the child's voice is less apparent in the process of constructing the assessments and expectations of readiness. The Indirect Effects perspective on transitions explicitly recognises the interactions between the child and those that support him/her during the transition. These include interactions with teachers, peers, family and community members. There is also recognition of the relationships and interactions of those around the child in supporting the transition, but these relationships are viewed as static (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Figure 6 illustrates these relationships.

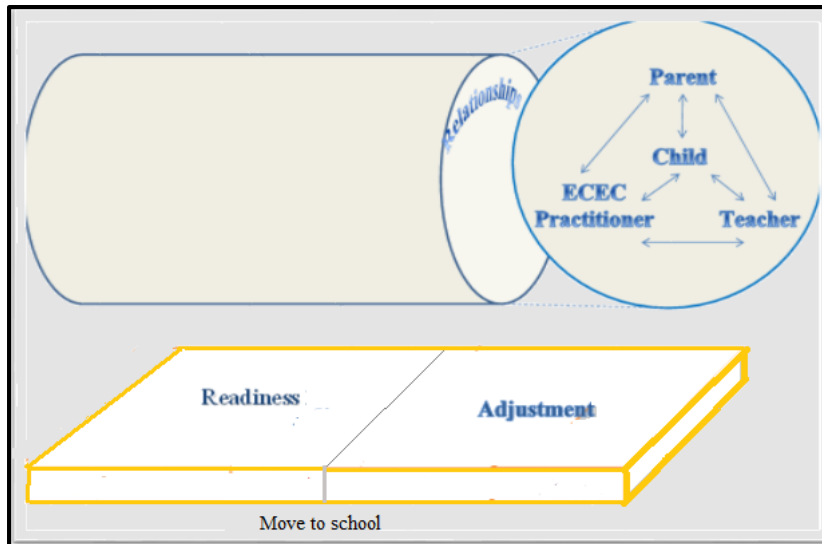


2.2 Figure 6: Static Relationships during the Transition to School

From this perspective the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers are static during the process of preparing and supporting children during the transition. The qualities of the relationships and interactions between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers remain unchanged, as do the perceptions that they hold of each other. These relationships will support or hinder the child's readiness for and adjustment to school. When these relationships support a child's readiness and adjustment then these are placed close together on the transition continuum and near to the school start date. If the relationships do not support children's adjustment to school then adjustment will be placed further along the continuum.

Perspective 4

Finally the Interactionist perspective on readiness and the Ecological and Dynamic perspective on transition recognise the 'interweaving of the biological and social' (John-Steiner et al., 1994:3). Both perspectives also view readiness and transitions as dynamic processes. The Interactionist perspective primarily focuses on the 'reciprocal relationships' (Meisels, 1999:68) between the child and the teacher, but there is also recognition of the experiences and relationships the child has beyond school. The Ecological and Dynamic perspective acknowledges the evolving relationships and interactions between the child and the adults around him/her and the relationships and interactions between these adults during the transition. Meisel's (1999) Interactionist perspective on readiness and Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta's (2000) Ecological and Dynamic perspective on transitions both view relationships between those preparing and supporting children during the transition to school, as evolving as time passes. This creates The Relational Transition to school, which is represented in Figure 7.



2.2 Figure 7: The Relational Transition to School

The double headed arrows on the face of the cylinder, in Figure 7, represent the relationships and interactions between the child, parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers during the transition. These arrows (relationships) run throughout the cylinder. At any point a vertical slice of the cylinder will show the relationships at this time in the transition. The definition of readiness and adjustment and where these are situated on the continuum will be constructed by children, parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers.

2.3 The Transition to School

Preparations for the transition to school can begin a year before children start school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). For instance, in Section 1.6 it was discussed that there was an expectation in the Southward LA school admission policy that parents would submit their child's school application eight months prior to them starting school. Some parents may have started preparations even earlier if they had researched which school to send their child to before completing the application

form. This is only one phase of the transition. A transition also includes the move between settings: the last day at an ECEC setting and the first day at school, as well as a phase of adjustment after the first day at school. When adjusting to school, children will learn to make sense of 'differences and discontinuities' (Margetts, 2002:105) they encounter in the new context. Adjusting and adapting to school will often take time as children learn about their role as a school pupil (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Brooker, 2008) and about learning at school. After the move the role of the parents and teachers is to support the children as they adjust to school.

This phase of the transition is as important as the preparations. The change in contexts and expectations can cause a child's well-being to dip. If the child's well-being remains low, this can affect his/her capacity to learn and to construct positive attitudes and dispositions to learning at school and school (Dowling, 2000). This can lead to the child having negative attitudes and dispositions to school learning and school, which can remain with him/her throughout his/her school career (Margetts, 2009). A child's low well-being can also manifest as problematic behaviour (Margretts, 2002), which will influence how teachers and peers view and interact with the child. It is important that children adjust to school soon after they start, so that they have positive attitudes to themselves and others as well as school and learning at school.

A healthy ecology, with supportive linkages between the settings in the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), will support the children's adjustment at school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). In a context where respectful relationships are established between the parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers (Gonzalez, 2005), the linkages in the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) will be strengthened. The qualities of these respectful relationships are 'mutual trust, positive orientation,

goal consensus and a balance of power' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:216). Such relationships enable communication and the sharing of knowledge about children and their experiences. A positive relational environment will enable parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers to view each other's knowledge (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as credible and useful (Gonzalez, 2005). Sharing and using the information is likely to limit any discontinuities between the home, ECEC setting and school. Instead, there is a sense of familiarity in the new school context for the child. The reflections and continuities between the home, ECEC setting and school are likely to support the children's adjustment as they become a school pupil and learn at school.

It is also important to acknowledge that when children start school parents (Fthenakis, 1998), ECEC practitioners and teachers also experience a transition. In the home there will be a reorganisation of routines for family members and parents will change roles from being a parent of an ECEC child to a parent of a school child (Brooker, 2008). Parents and children also adjust to the loss of leaving the ECEC setting and the relationships with ECEC practitioners (Woodhead & Moss, 2007). ECEC practitioners and teachers will also adjust to the loss of relationships between them and the children who have moved to the next stage in their education, whilst establishing new relationships with the different children and parents. The transition to school affords the possibility of learning for adults and children as they adjust to their new roles and experiences (Brooker, 2008).

2.4 'Transitions', 'Readiness', 'Roles', the EYFS (DfE, 2012) and the EYFSP (STA, 2013)

The term transition is not referred to in the EYFS (DfE, 2012a), but despite the omission this phase of children's care and education is a transition-intensive period.

From birth to five years children can experience many 'horizontal transitions'. These are moves between different contexts during the course of a day/week/month, such as from and to the child's home, to a child-minder's home, or day nursery, or pre-school setting (Neuman, 2002). Children may also experience 'vertical transitions', which are linked to their age (Johansson, 2007:34). Possible vertical transitions, during the EYFS, include the move from the baby room to the toddler room in an ECEC setting, the move from ECEC setting to the reception class and finally the move from reception class to Year 1.

As discussed at the beginning of this thesis, parents share the task of caring for and educating their children with the state. This expectation is reflected in the EYFS (DfE, 2012a), which states:

....what providers must do, working in partnership with parents and/or carers, to promote the learning and development of all children in their care, and to ensure they are ready for school (DfE, 2012a:4).

Further analysis of the EYFS (DfE, 2012a) concurs that parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers are preparing children not just for one but for two vertical transitions during this phase. In contexts where children move from an ECEC setting to a reception class, the terms "ready for school" (DfE, 2012a:6) and 'school readiness' (DfE, 2012a:2) can refer to this transition. This is 'an institutional transition' (Woodhead & Moss, 2007:8). The terms "readiness for Year 1" (DfE, 2012a:11) and "ready for Year 1" (DfE, 2012a:6) are then associated with the second transition, which is when children move from the reception class to Year 1. During this transition children move from an environment guided by the EYFS (DfE, 2012a) to an environment following the expectations of the KS1 NC. This is a curriculum transition. It is parents' and ECEC practitioners' role to prepare children for the institutional transition. Preparations can include fostering children's

‘resourcefulness’, ‘resilience’ and adeptness at establishing relationships with adults and children (Brooker, 2008:89). These dispositions and skills will support children in making sense of the discontinuities and differences they encounter when moving to the reception class. It is the teachers’ role to prepare children for the curriculum transition by preparing them to be ready for the academic learning of KS1 NC.

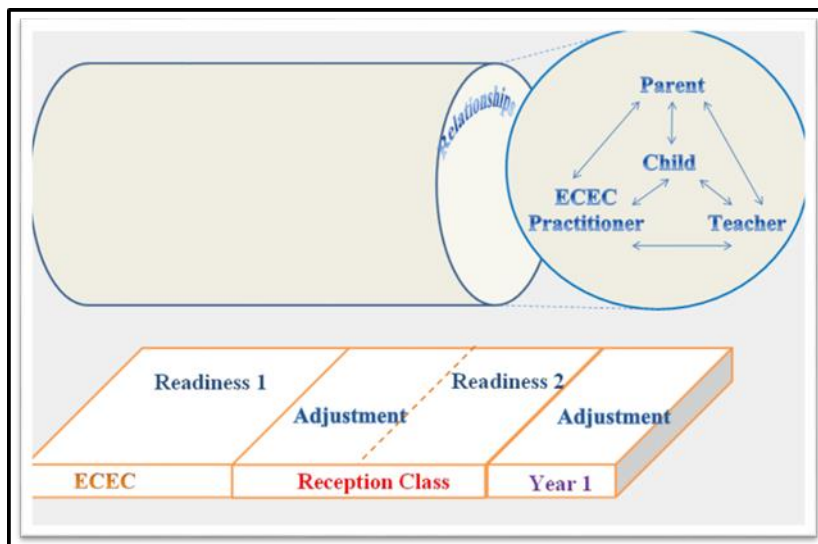
The roles of the ECEC practitioners and reception teachers are also reiterated in the Framework as it outlines how children are prepared for the formal learning associated with the KS1 NC in Year 1:

As children grow older, and as their development allows, it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1. (DfE, 2012a:6)

The younger children during this phase will experience practices underpinned by the ECEC ethos, whereas older children will experience environments guided by the school tradition. The ECEC ethos is echoed in the phrase ‘as their development allows’, as it aligns with the child centred practices of ECEC practitioners providing time and space for the child to mature (Brooker, 2005). The phrase is underpinned by Perspective 1, ‘The Transition to School: development within the child’, which is referred to in Section 2.2. The older children referred to in the statement above are usually in a reception class. During the reception year teachers are expected to close the gap between the different pedagogical methodologies of ECEC and school (DfE, 2012a; OECD, 2006) by introducing more adult-led activities. These will prepare children for the formal learning associated with the KS1 NC in Year 1. The practices are underpinned by Perspective 2 ‘The Environmental Transition to School’, Section 2.2.

The EYFS (DfE, 2012a) also outlines the expectations of teachers when sharing information with parents, which again infers it is the role of the teacher to prepare children for school learning. It states that teachers must ‘share the results of the Profile with parents and/or carers, and explain to them when and how they can discuss the Profile with the teacher who completed it’ (DfE, 2012a:12). The policy expectations seem to be that information flows in one direction, from teacher to parent. Such expectations can marginalise parents’ views and experiences with their children, but it reinforces the idea that it is the teachers’ role to teach and assess children’s learning at school, so preparing the children for learning in Year 1.

In light of the discussion above, The Relational Transition to school (Figure 7, section 2.2) is further developed to reflect the English ECEC context by including the two transitions with which school readiness is associated. Figure 8 ‘The Relational Transition to School’ and the explanation below lay out these developments.



2.4 Figure 8 ‘The Relational Transition to School’

In Figure 8 both transitions with which school readiness is associated are represented. The first transition is the institutional transition, when children move from the ECEC setting to the school reception class, and the second transition is the curriculum transition, when children move from an environment guided by the EYFS (DfE, 2012a) to an environment following the KS1 NC. Each transition includes children's readiness and adjustment. At this stage in the thesis the model displayed in Figure 8 'The Relational Transition to School' is still emergent and will be returned to and developed further during the analysis of the data.

Yeboah (2002) suggested that 'children are gradually introduced to new school processes when they transfer to primary school' (Yeboah, 2002:26). As the reception class is physically located in the school, but still guided by the EYFS (DfE, 2012a), the reception year could be viewed as a period of adjustment when children are introduced to the school culture and the role of a pupil in preparation for school learning in Year 1.

2.5 Ready Families, Schools and Communities

The above analysis of the EYFS (DfE, 2012a) has primarily focused on the child's school readiness. Positioning the expectations of readiness solely with the child has been challenged by some academics as they have argued it should be families, schools, services and communities that should be ready (Arnold et al, 2007; Centre for Community Child Health. 2008). The Australian policy brief 'Rethinking School Readiness' succinctly defines and describes the systems and services that support those around the children to be ready.

- Ready families - the systems that support parents' engagement with their child's learning and education.
- Ready communities - the informal (friends, family) and formal (libraries, health services) resources and supports available to families with young children.
- Ready services - including the availability, quality and affordability of ECEC settings.
- Ready schools - the links established with early years services, transition support programs for children, strategies to cater for children with diverse needs, and teachers with an understanding of early childhood development.

(Centre for Community Child Health. 2008:3)

This framework shifts the expectation upon the child to be school ready to the responsibility of families, local communities and schools (Dockett & Perry, 2001). The shift in responsibility can appear to be a positive move, but caution is needed, particularly if the readiness discourse dominates education policies, as in England. The demand for ready parents, ready teachers, ready services and ready community can instead position one or all of these groups as being inadequate in carrying out their role in supporting children's learning and development and so being in need of an intervention to be fixed (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

In England a system that can be used to ascertain if the parents are providing appropriate home learning experiences for their child is the two-year-old progress check (DfE, 2012a). During the child's second year ECEC practitioners measure the child's development in the prime areas of personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication and language (DfE, 2012a). If the child is not meeting the expected levels of development, ECEC practitioners are required to discuss with parents 'how the summary of development can be used to support learning at home' (DfE, 2012a:11). Families may also be

labelled as having one or more of the characteristics of The Troubled Family Programme, such as having no adult in work, children who are not attending school or family members who are involved in crime and anti-social behaviour (Gov.UK 2012b), so placing them in need of an intervention programme. Parents who are deemed as not supporting their child's learning and development will be expected to attend an intervention such as one of the parenting programmes: PEEP, Triple P, The Incredible Years. During these programmes parents will be taught how to create an appropriate home learning environment for their child's school success (Melhuish, et al 2008).

Teachers' performance is also measured and monitored through OfSTED inspections, league tables and performance management systems. Children's academic attainment is used to assess the performance of teachers. These aim to ensure that teachers are teaching children the necessary skills and knowledge so that they are ready for the next phase of their education. ECEC practitioners' performance is also monitored through OfSTED inspections. A school or ECEC setting can be judged as inadequate or required to improve if OfSTED inspectors consider that children in the setting/school are not making enough progress in their learning and development. In such cases an intervention is put in place for teachers and ECEC practitioners to raise standards of practice.

There have been further discussions to measure the effectiveness of the ECEC setting. The consultation of 'Primary assessment and accountability under the new national curriculum', launched in July 2013, explained that there was an intention to introduce a baseline test for children at the beginning of the reception year as this would provide: 'valuable national information on the effectiveness of different types of early years provision' (DfE, 2013c, bullet point 5.6).

Situating the problem and fault with either the home, ECEC setting or school is underpinned by Perspective 2, 'The Environmental Transition to School', (see Section 2.2). Blame can be apportioned to parents, ECEC practitioners or teachers who are perceived as not meeting the expectations of their role in supporting children's learning and development or readiness for school.

2.6 Summary

Bruner (1966) has argued that readiness is a 'mischievous half-truth' as 'readiness is not an end in itself; it is the beginning of an active teaching and learning engagement' (Meisels, 1999:43). In this chapter I have suggested readiness for school is only part of the transition to school and that children's adjustment to school is also a part of the process. Both readiness and adjustment are represented in the conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School'. Analysis of the EYFS framework (DfE, 2012a) found during this phase of children's educational trajectory the term school readiness can be associated with either an institutional transition or a curriculum transition. The institutional transition is the move from the ECEC setting to the reception class and the curriculum transition the move from the EYFS to KS1 NC. Both transitions are represented in 'The Relational Transition to School'.

In English educational policies the readiness discourse prevails (Moss, 2013). Not only does the focus on readiness shorten the transition process, but it can also position those perceived as not ensuring children are 'ready for school' as requiring support to develop their practices in the home, ECEC setting or reception class so that the children are ready for school. This can compromise the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, which can in turn compromise the children's adjustment to school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). This

perspective overlooks that the home, ECEC setting and school provide different learning experiences for the children and that parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers have different views of their role in supporting children's learning and development. The different beliefs that parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers have and their relationships are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 –Relationships Between Those Supporting Children During The Transition To School

3 Introduction

In the previous chapter the discussion led to the assertion that the relationships between those who prepare and support children during the transition to school are influential in the nature of children's adjustment to school. From an ecological perspective, how parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' relationships are established and maintained is of particular interest (Pianta et al, 1999). These relationships are influenced by parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' personal perceptions which they have constructed throughout their lives (Gonzalez et al, 2005; Brooker 2003). These perceptions will also influence how parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers view their roles in preparing and supporting children during the transition to school. Parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' experiences that shape their relationships and perceptions of each other are discussed further in this chapter.

3.1 Different but Similar Personal Cultural Heritages

How parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers prepare and support children depends upon their personal cultural heritage. These adults will draw upon their personal theories that they have constructed with others in both the private world of the family and in the public institutions of ECEC settings and schools, as a child and as an adult (Bruner, 1996; Vogler et al, 2008). Socio-cultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff 2003) best explain how these adults supporting

children can have different knowledge and beliefs about school, the child and learning.

From a historical socio-cultural perspective of learning, the construction of knowledge is a collaborative process as members of a group engage in activities and processes together (Bleakley, 2006; Eraut, 2007). During the process of constructing knowledge group members draw upon 'values embedded in the historical traditions' (Winther-Lindqvist, 2012:117) of the group, such as parenting styles (Riojas-Cortez, 2001). The 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al, 1992:133) that they construct are situated in a specific historical, cultural context (Eun, 2010; Nakata, 2006) and are distributed between others, mediated by artefacts and collective rituals (Bleakley, 2006). These funds of knowledge influence both adults' and children's attitudes to school and school learning as well as their aspirations in life. From this perspective the transition to school may be viewed as a collective ritual. As parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers participate in this ritual, all adults will be guided by their beliefs, knowledge and culture (Brooker, 2008) which they have constructed during their life-course.

Whilst each family has unique funds of knowledge, it is likely that families who live in the same neighbourhood will have similar funds of knowledge, as these have been constructed in broadly the same cultural context (Brooker, 2008). As discussed in Section 1.7, some parents are less likely to exercise choice when deciding where to send their child to primary school (Whitworth et al, 2009). This can result in most children attending the main primary school in the neighbourhood where they live and therefore having similar funds of knowledge. By contrast teachers often do not live in the neighbourhood where the school they work is situated (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and may well have constructed their cultural views,

beliefs and aspirations for the children in a different cultural context to the children in their class and the parents of the children. Teachers and parents can hold different beliefs and aspirations for children (Bernstein, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). The schooling systems and structures also tend to validate middle class knowledge and culture (Reay, 2006). If there is a lack of opportunity for teachers to gain insights into the parents' knowledge and culture, school and home can become distinct and 'the school isolated from the neighbourhood' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:230). This can lead to parents' knowledge and culture from working class communities being marginalised, which can exacerbate the differences between the home and school knowledge and culture.

Although teachers may not live in the community where they work, ECEC practitioners often do. A consequence of the expansion of ECEC provision over the past two decades was an increase in the demand for ECEC practitioners, and one pool of possible recruits was local mothers (SureStart, 2004). The EYFS (DCSF, 2008) stated that good practice is when ECEC practitioners recognise that:

Parents can be helped to understand more about learning and teaching through workshops on important areas such as play, outdoor learning or early reading. Some parents may go on to access further education (DCSF, 2008b:2:2)

Providing opportunities for parents to find out about their children's learning could reintroduce parents to their own formal learning. Through developing their interests in their child could also lead parents to train as ECEC practitioners and then work with young children. This intention was explicit in the guidance '*Working Together: a Sure Start guide to the childcare and early education field*' (2004), as the programmes were expected to be:

- running training programmes for prospective childcare workers;
 - gathering and disseminating information on local childcare training opportunities;
 - getting more people into work – including childcare jobs;
- (SureStart, 2004:8)

SSLPs were located in areas of deprivation which were often working class neighbourhoods; thus the recruits for the childcare jobs were from these localities. This would support Osgood's assertion that 'the vast majority of childcare professionals are working class' (Osgood, 2005:290). In these neighbourhoods, initiatives such as Neighbourhood Nurseries and SSCC offered job opportunities for the local residents. Consequently the newly trained ECEC practitioners often worked and lived in the local neighbourhood. Working in these settings enabled ECEC practitioners who were mothers to fulfil their parental responsibilities such as collecting their children from school. ECEC practitioners, living in the same neighbourhood, are more likely to be familiar with the parents' funds of knowledge and aspirations for their children, whilst also having 'valuable insight into the particular social dynamics' (Yarrow, 2015:9) in the local context. The ECEC practitioners draw upon these funds of knowledge and insights when developing and establishing the practices in the ECEC settings. There will be a sense of familiarity in the expectations and practices of the ECEC setting, for local children and parents, as there will be reflections of the local community's culture.

3.2 Different Training Routes to Becoming a Teacher and ECEC Practitioner

The ECEC practitioner role in the private and voluntary sector has been and continues to be described as a low paid, low status occupation (Nutbrown, 2012). As well as low pay there has also been a lack of professional development and

career progression for those working in the private and voluntary ECEC settings, whilst in the maintained sector early years teachers command higher salaries and better prospects of both pay and career progression (Owen & Haynes, 2010).

In 2003 the reform of the ECEC sector workforce was a cornerstone of the Labour government's ECM agenda; 'our goal must be to make working with children an attractive, high status career, and to develop a more skilled and flexible workforce' (DfES, 2003:10). The reforms provided opportunities for ECEC practitioners to be trained to degree level and beyond. By 2013, 62% of SSCC leaders held a masters level qualification and another 14% held a degree (Sylva, et al 2015: Section 3.3). There was still no requirement for managers of ECEC settings to be trained to this level. Instead the expectation was for them to hold 'a full and relevant level 3 qualification' (DfE, 2012a:17). The developments in workforce reform have not been consistent across the sector, as there are still ECEC practitioners in low pay and low status positions, which explains Nutbrown's findings in 2012.

Not only can ECEC practitioners and teachers have different personal cultural heritages and professional training but, as described in the Introduction chapter (Sections 1 and 1.2), ECEC sector and CSE have different trajectories. The ECEC ethos and school tradition each have different views of the child, and different understandings of learning, the purpose of education and the adult's role in supporting children's learning (Dahlberg, 2013). These different beliefs guide teachers and ECEC practitioners when preparing and supporting children during the transition.

3.3 Beliefs about Learning, The Child and The Adult's Role

In Section 1.4 it was explained the ECEC ethos has 'origins in the period of Enlightenment' (Brooker, 2005:117). The philosophy of the Enlightenment views the child as natural and innocent (Hendrick: 1997), who will grow and mature with time. These views of the child's development are closely associated with 'the regimes of truth of developmental psychology' (Brooker, 2005:117). This perspective views the child as solitary and his/her development as following a typical biological trajectory, which is determined by his/her internal biological clock. It is the child's development that leads the learning process (Goswami, 2008). When the child's development allows, he/she actively constructs understandings and develops skills as he/she interacts with the environment. The role of the ECEC practitioner is as a facilitator of development and learning (Young-Ihm, 2002). By providing a rich environment and time (Young-Ihm, 2002) ECEC practitioners enable 'individual actions and transformations', which happen as the child matures (Lourenço, 2012:291). The assessment of the child focuses on what they can do and understand now. Returning to the perspectives of the transition to school Section 2.2, the preparation and support for the child that guides those whose practices are underpinned by the ECEC ethos aligns with Perspective 1 'The Transition to School: development within the child'.

The school teaching and learning tradition views children as less able to decide the subject content and lead their own learning process (Brooker, 2008). The learner is constructed as passive in the learning process as the teacher transmits knowledge associated with 'specialised subjects' (Bernstein, 2000:45). During these teaching episodes the teacher controls the 'pace, sequence, criteria and

communication' (Bernstein, 2000:13) between themselves and the children. Techniques such as rote learning and sanctions and rewards are used to shape children's behaviour, approaches which are associated with behaviourist theories of learning (Dahlberg et al, 1999). The criteria for assessment will be explicit and specific, and the learner made aware of them (Bernstein, 2000:46). The assessment of learning focuses on what is missing. The perspective associated with the school heritage of the transition to school is Perspective 2 'The Environmental Transition to School' as discussed in Section 2.2.

Whilst parents' beliefs about learning and views of their child as a learner are not always visible (Brooker, 2008), no one would doubt that they have supported their children's learning from birth. When children enter school they are not devoid of any understandings of their world, but instead they bring with them to school 'virtual school bags' (Thomson & Hall, 2008:89) filled with their funds of knowledge (Moll et al, 1992). To explain children's learning in the home I return to the socio-cultural theories of learning. This perspective views children and adults as active in the process of learning during everyday tasks and activities in and around the home (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Rogoff, 1990). During the process of guided participation children make links with current meanings and construct new meanings (Rogoff, 1990). This perspective takes into account the historical and cultural context within which the funds of knowledge are constructed. When considering the perspectives of the transition to school in Section 2.2, Perspective 4 'The Relational Transition to School' views knowledge construction as a social process and acknowledges that parents and children have and will continue to co-construct meaning beyond the ECEC setting and school during the transition to school.

In England the generally held belief in society is that school is an institution where learning happens. This supposition and parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' own prior experiences of attending school and being a school pupil might reinforce the view that 'for something to count as learning, it should be like school learning and result in a knowledge like school knowledge' (Dreier, 2003:8). These beliefs may well reinforce the idea that it is the teachers' role to teach children the school knowledge and skills, which then influences parents' and ECEC practitioners' expectations of and relationships with teachers. Consequently these assumptions also guide parents' and ECEC practitioners' practices when preparing children to be ready for school and the way the teachers respond to the children in their classes (Brooker, 2008).

3.4 Beliefs and Views of Each Other

These different personal and professional traditions also shape parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs and views of each other and themselves. Parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers can view each other as partner, 'competitor or stranger' (Bronfenbrenner, 1997:226). Often it is these subjectivities and 'mindsets' (Edwards, 2006:174) that govern the relationships between people. Power relations come into play and certain groups are dominated and constrained by the relationships around them (Blumer, 1969; Burr, 2003). Parents who perceive themselves as having less power are less likely to share with teachers/ECEC practitioners their views of and experiences with their children or to be involved in school/setting life, as they are less confident in their own practices and ability to support their child. Parents who are confident in their competence as a parent and

in their dealings with teachers will interact and be involved in school life and learning (Brooker, 2008).

Parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' views of each other's 'social position, status, role, authority and prestige' (Blumer, 1969:7) will also define how information is shared and how this is used by those that receive the information. If the information is shared in a context where there is mutual trust, respect and love (Freire, 1970, Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and where communication is two-way, there will be 'a balance of power favourable to those linking parties' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:218). These relationships will enhance the opportunities to create linkages between settings as the inter-setting knowledge is viewed as valuable and of use in each of the settings. If, on the contrary, the view of the other is not positive, the inter-setting knowledge can reinforce prejudices between the groups and limit the opportunities to create linkages between the groups.

Regardless of whether parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers have positive or negative views of each other and of the learning that goes on at school, all groups do share the same goal. They all want children to have a successful transition to school so that they adjust to being a member of the school and continue to learn (Bennett, 2006, Brooker, 2005, Whalley, 2001).

3.5 Relationships and Communication

3.5.1 Between Parents and ECEC Practitioners

Shields' (2009) small scale research, which explored parents' views of their relationships with ECEC practitioners and teachers after their child had started school, established that parents had shared information with ECEC practitioners. Parents explained they believed that ECEC practitioners had found this information

useful and valuable as the ECEC practitioners had used the information to plan for their child's learning in the ECEC setting (Shields, 2009). Planning for the child's learning was a collaborative process between them and ECEC practitioners. During this collaboration parents discussed how they had established and developed 'warm and friendly relationships' (Shields, 2009:241) with ECEC practitioners. These relationships fostered 'two way communication' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:216) between the groups which enabled the information discussed by parents and ECEC practitioners to influence the ECEC setting environment and culture, which was also likely to influence the home context.

The information that the parents and ECEC practitioners shared, such as a child's everyday needs, sleep, eating, their interests etc., Bernstein (2000:157) termed as 'every-day or common sense knowledge'. The forms and language used when communicating common sense knowledge are associated with the horizontal discourse (Painter, 2008). The every-day knowledge is often spoken, 'local, context-dependent and specific, tacit, multi-layered and contradictory across but not within contexts' (Bernstein, 2000:157). Such information is generally discussed during informal interactions at the beginning and end of the day when parents leave or drop off their child at the ECEC setting (Duncan et al, 2006). Another contributing factor for the ease of the flow of information between parents and ECEC practitioners was discussed in Section 3.1. The cultural insights into parenting styles and aspirations that ECEC practitioners have, when they live in the same neighbourhood as the parents, enable them to have a sense of the implicit meanings of the common sense knowledge parents discuss with them.

Including parents' views in the planning of children's learning recognises that parents and ECEC practitioners are not in opposition but instead have

complementary views and understandings of the child. ECEC practitioners' knowledge 'constitutes a 'public' (and generalised) form of 'theory' about child development whilst the latter [parents] represents a 'personal theory' about the development of a particular child' (Easen, et al, 1992:285). Both perspectives offer different ways of viewing the children. In contexts where parents and ECEC practitioners view each other views as complimentary they can engage in the collaborative process of co-constructing meanings of the child.

3.5.2 Between Parents and Teachers

Research has also found that parents become less involved in their child's learning as they progress through school (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; OfSTED, 2014). Shield's (2009) research concurs with these findings. Parents told her that when their children had started school they did not view themselves as partners in their children's education. Instead they alleged that their relationships with their children's school teacher were 'more distant and less reciprocal' (Shields, 2009:237) than they had had with ECEC practitioners. This might contribute to an explanation of why parents become less involved in their child's education.

These parents' accounts are reinforced by the expectations of the EYFS (DfE, 2012a) framework. The discussion in Section 2.4 explained that during the reception year activities became increasingly led by adults. The content of the adult-led teaching sessions is the 'educational knowledge which the state constructs and distributes to educational institutions' (Bernstein, 2000: 65). The focus of the conversations between parents and teachers can then become increasingly about children's academic learning. This may reduce the opportunities for two-way communication as well as marginalise certain groups of parents' understandings

and home practices. Usually middle class families' practices and knowledge complement and are more valued by the education system than others (Bernstein, 2000: Brooker 2002). This can then lead to the information shared by parents of marginalised social groups being viewed as less valuable and useful in the school, both by themselves and by teachers. Parents may then become less inclined to be involved in school life.

Not only do the schooling systems influence parents' involvement in their children's schooling and the relationships they have with their children's teacher, but also their beliefs about school, which are based on their past experiences. These beliefs will guide how parents become involved in their children's learning and their participation in school life (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013). A child's transition to school can trigger memories of negative feelings for some parents (Field et al, 2012) if they do not have positive recollections of their transition to school, or school career. These negative recollections of school and school learning and parents' confidence (Wilshaw, 2013) can limit opportunities for them to interact and to establish positive relationships with teachers. Teachers in turn may view this reluctance to be involved as parents not being interested in their children's learning. Such perceptions ultimately influence the relationships and interactions between parents and teachers (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

3.5.3 Between ECEC Setting and Reception Class/School

It is not only the views and beliefs of the ECEC practitioners and teachers that will influence the relationship between an ECEC setting and a school, but also the political context. Whilst the readiness discourse dominates England's education policies, the relationship between ECEC setting and school can be described as the

'readiness relationship' (Moss, 2013:9). Although in England the readiness relationship dominates, Moss argues that there are alternative relationships between ECEC and school (Moss, 2013). The relationships are a 'Strong and Equal Partnership' (OECD, 2006) and 'Meeting Place' (Dahlberg & Lenz Taguchi, 1994). Each of these relationships will now be considered further.

The readiness relationship has been discussed in Section 1.5. To reiterate, this is a hierarchical relationship and the ECEC sector is at the bottom. The purpose of the ECEC setting is seen as to 'serve the objectives' (OECD, 2006:3) of school by preparing children for school and formal learning (Moss, 2013; 2014a). A school-ready child is ready to learn the skills, knowledge and behaviours associated with school and being a pupil (Graue, 2006; Kagan, 2007).

The second relationship is a "Strong and Equal Partnership" between school and ECEC sector (OECD, 2006). Examples of this relationship can be found in Nordic and Central European Countries (Cameron & Moss, 2011: OECD, 2006). In these contexts there is 'recognition of early childhood pedagogy as an important part of the education process' (OECD, 2006:58), and that ECEC settings and school are seen as equal and complementary. The practices of the ECEC sector continue and push up into at least the first year of school (OECD, 2006).

The third relationship that Moss refers to is a 'Meeting Place' (2013; 2014a). Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi (1994) discussed this relationship in a document for the Swedish government. They advocated building on a Strong and Equal partnership, where teachers and ECEC practitioners come together in a pedagogical Meeting Place (Dahlberg, 2013). The Meeting Place provides the space and opportunity for both parties to engage in the process of dialogue to construct a shared culture

(Moss, 2013). ECEC practitioners and school teachers recognise the strengths that each group brings to the Meeting Place and in this space both groups can consider long-held beliefs and share each other's beliefs. Together ECEC practitioners and school teachers engage in the process of dialogue and reflection. This encounter (Dahlberg, 2013) between the groups will enable them to negotiate and construct meanings (Nakata, 2006) so that there is a shared understanding of children, learning, education and their role in the process (Dahlberg, 2013). The purpose of the dialogue is not to 'further cultural loss' (Nakata, 2006:273), but instead to construct new and shared meanings which includes ECEC practitioners' and teachers' views (Dahlberg, 2013; Nakata, 2006). The perspective of the child that guides ECEC practitioners and teachers in this process is the child as 'a constructor of culture and knowledge' (Dahlberg, 2013:82).

3.6 The Transition to School as a Meeting Place

Some academics have argued that an 'alignment of the curriculum' (Educational Transitions and Change (ETC) Research Group, 2011:4) will more likely enable children to have a successful transition to school. In England when children start the school reception class, the curriculum is in fact aligned, as both ECEC practitioners and reception teachers are expected to meet the requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2012a). Despite the alignment of the curriculum and all adults wanting children to have a successful transition to school, the political focus on children's 'school readiness' suggests that there is a concern that some children start school not ready for school learning. Considering children who are school ready and do adjust to school quickly offers insights into what features can support children's adjustment to school and school learning. It is generally acknowledged that children

who are more likely to adjust to and be successful at school are those whose home culture, values and funds of knowledge are reflected or are similar to those in the school context (Brooker, 2002; Bernstein, 2000; Ball, 2003). The children that find adjusting to school difficult are those where there is a 'mismatch between what students have learned in their home cultures and what is required of them at school' (Bransford et al, 1999, cited in Engeström et al, 2002:60). Rather than an alignment of the academic curriculum, my discussion suggests that a reflection of the culture, values and funds of knowledge of the home in the school context and curriculum is more likely to support children's adjustment after the move to school. Moreover, the difficulties that children have in adjusting to school may be exacerbated if the culture and the knowledge the children have constructed whilst attending the ECEC setting are also not reflected in the school. Not only can the knowledge at school be out of context and have little meaning to the children, but also the process of learning at school can be very different to the experiences in the home and at ECEC setting. When at school children have to make sense of the discontinuities and differences in pedagogical approaches (Margetts, 2002; 2009). Instead of aligning the curriculum to support children's adjustment to school this discussion suggests that an alignment of pedagogical approaches as well as the funds of knowledge of the home, ECEC setting and school is also required.

The discussion above does not recommend a further trickling down of school teaching methodologies into ECEC settings, or into the home. There is not a shared definition of Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi's (1994) 'Meeting Place' where co-constructions can take place (Bennett, 2013). A 'Meeting Place' does offer an alternative relationship between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers. During the phases of the transition parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers can establish

different relationships and co-construct meanings, as the norms of practice, are less dense (Waite, 2013).

3.7 Research Questions

The readiness relationship (Moss, 2013) that dominates England's ECEC policies and practices can limit the opportunities for parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers to establish collaborative and 'horizontal relationships' based upon trust and respect (Freire, 1970:72). The readiness relationship positions ECEC practitioners at the bottom on the 'epistemological hierarchy' (Urban, 2008:141). As parents and ECEC practitioners share the role of preparing children for school, instead of ECEC practitioners being positioned at the bottom of this hierarchy, parent's beliefs of how to support their child's learning and development could be positioned beneath the beliefs of ECEC practitioners. The hierarchical nature of these relationships can also constrain parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers from engaging in 'relational activity of knowledge construction' (Dahlberg & Moss 2005:102), as they prepare and support children for the transition to school. Despite these constraints, the inconsistencies and contradictions (Ball 2008; Alexander 2010) in education policies can offer possibilities for different relationships and interactions between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers.

Therefore my research questions are:

- What are parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs about school readiness and their roles in preparing children to be in the state of school readiness?

- What are the qualities of the relationships and interactions between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers and how do these change as they prepare and support children during the transition to school?
- What opportunities are there to co-construct beliefs of the child, learning and each other's role in the process during the transition? What happens when parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers are provided with a space to co-construct meanings?

Chapter 4 –Methodology, Methods and Ethics

4 Introduction

In this chapter I outline my methodological beliefs that have guided me when making decisions about the design of the research and the methods used to generate the data. My methodology was inevitably qualitative, as the phenomena explored were people's perceptions and relationships. The research design was a case study. When considering the case study design and the ethical implications, care was taken to avoid placing participants in a subordinate position in relation to me and to each other. It was not only my philosophical beliefs about knowledge and knowledge construction that shaped my decision to do a case study with two cases, but the national and local political contexts also influenced the research design.

4.1 Methodological Approach

Throughout my life, I have constructed a personal view of the world, principles and values. As an ECEC practitioner/teacher and doctoral student I have developed an awareness of these, through the process of critical reflection. I am aware that my beliefs, principles and values have guided me as I have made decisions and taken actions in my private and professional life (Alexander 2010). I have been particularly impressed by the idea that education can promote social justice (Francis & Mills, 2012) and as an ECEC practitioner I always strove to create democratic learning environments with learners. Central to this process were dialogue and reflection (Freire, 1970). I aimed to view those whom I worked with (children and adults) as active and capable in the process of constructing knowledge and culture. I would also focus on children's, parents' and ECEC practitioners' strengths and

interests instead of their limitations. These beliefs have also guided me in the decision I have made when designing the research (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002; Robson, 2011).

In keeping with my views about people and the belief that the construction of knowledge and culture is a social process (Burr, 2003) my epistemological position aligns with socio-cultural theories of knowledge construction (Rogoff, 2003). I believe people are social actors who as individuals, and with the groups to which they belong, construct knowledge and views of the world in their historical and cultural context (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Burr, 2003). These perceptions then become the individual's and group's ontological reality (Crotty, 1998). I tend to reject any extreme positivist view of the world in which there can be a universal truth (Crotty, 1998; Burr, 2003).

Leading on from this epistemological point of view, this study adopts an interpretative approach to explore and gain insights into parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs and relationships during the transition, through the qualitative data generated. A qualitative case study was designed, as this would enable me to explore the phenomenon embedded in a context, so retaining 'the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events' (Yin, 2009:3).

4.2 The Journey to a Case Study

In response to my observation of the strained relationships between teachers and ECEC practitioners, in the context where I worked, my original intention, as a SSCC teacher, was to carry out an action research project. The aim of the action research was for parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers to share their beliefs about school readiness and begin the process of co-constructing a definition of the term. Due to

changes in national policy my position as SSCC teacher became redundant. Consequently I believed it was not appropriate to conduct action research, as it is a cyclical process (Denscombe, 2007) and I did not want to start a project that I could not see through to the end.

I then designed a case study with a single case. My choice of case study methodology was motivated by the understanding that case study research affords researchers the opportunity to acknowledge and illuminate the various perspectives on the explored phenomenon, regardless of their power and status (May, 2011). The acknowledgment of the multiple meanings requires a 'realignment of power between the researcher and researched' (May, 2011:225). This is in keeping with my views of the participants. I did not want to be a researcher who positioned participants as 'subjects' to be explored for my own gain or in a subordinate position. Instead, my intention was to design a research project that afforded the opportunity for myself and the participants to learn together about the transition to school (Dutton & Duckerich, 2006). I understood that each of us had our individual aims and reasons for taking part in the research, but we all shared the overarching aim to ensure children have a successful transition to school and positive learning experiences at school. The nature of the research design afforded participants the opportunity to learn together by engaging in 'reflective conversations' (Schon, 1991:295). I constructed a PowerPoint with comments made during the individual interviews, politicians' speeches and academic theory. The comments on the PowerPoint slides provided participants and myself with insights into, and the opportunity to learn about, each other's views, beliefs, expectations and experiences which in the everyday life may be unsaid or not heard. For instance, after reading a teacher's comments on a PowerPoint slide Liam discussed new

insights. Presented on the PowerPoint slide was a statement made by Richard during his interview:

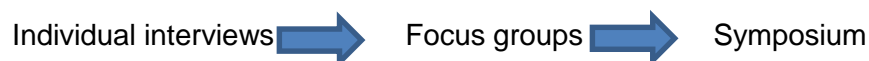
I haven't had a year yet where I haven't had a reception child come who doesn't need support in that kind of self-care. So I wouldn't say that children need to be able to do that [go to the toilet independently] before they come to school. (Interview, Richard, teacher, Castleton)

Liam commented:

I have never heard that point of view. Because I always assumed that every reception class teacher didn't want to spend time taking children to the toiletI didn't realise that that some accepted that children wouldn't be able to do that. (Focus group, Liam, parent, Castleton)

During the focus groups and symposium the comments could then be further discussed by participants.

The case study design had three phases and each phase informed the next. The phases are represented in Figure 9.



4.2 Figure 9: Phases of the Case Study

The data generating process started with individual interviews and then led to focus groups (FG) (participants in each focus group had similar roles). Finally there was the symposium (SYM) when parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers came together.

Throughout the data collection process there was a back-and-forth movement between the field and my study. I began in the field generating data during individual interviews. Afterwards I returned to my study to analyse the data and then returned

to the field to share emerging themes and collect more data during the focus groups and symposium. The purpose of the iterative process was to ensure that the participants' ideas and experiences were central to the reflective conversations, whilst also enabling me to keep an open mind about where the findings would lead me.

4.2.1 From a Single Case to Two Cases

The flexible design of the case study enabled me to respond to another issue that emerged, at a local level, during the research process. Initially, the case study comprised parents, ECEC practitioners, and teachers from the context in which I had worked. After generating the data it became apparent, when evaluating the 'sampling adequacy' (Robson, 2011:154), that the limited participation of teachers had resulted in insufficient data representing their experiences and beliefs. Another case was sought. Consequently the case study research consists of two cases in two different geographical communities. Each case comprises parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, and the relationships between the parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers and their beliefs about school readiness are the 'units of analysis' (Grünbaum, 2007:88) rather than the participants themselves. The boundary for each case includes the ECEC setting and the school reception class that share the same site, plus one other reception class in the local area to which parents could send their children.

Table 3 summarises the number of interviews, focus groups and symposia in each case.

| | Castleton | Townmouth |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Individual interviews | 17 | 0 |
| Focus groups | 4 (2 for parents & 2 for ECEC practitioners) | 3 (1 for parents, 1 for ECEC practitioners & 1 for teachers) |
| Symposium. | 1 | 1 |

4.2 1 Table 3: Summary of Methods in Each Case

The terms “Castleton” and “Townmouth” are used merely as convenient terms to distinguish the cases. In Castleton there were 17 individual interviews, four focus groups and one symposium. Two of the focus groups were for parents and the other two focus groups were for ECEC practitioners. As no teacher responded to the invitation to take part in the focus group, a teacher focus group did not happen. In Townmouth there were no individual interviews due to practical constraints of time and the cost of transcription. The research design then followed the similar pattern to that of Castleton case. There were focus groups for participants that shared similar roles, and a symposium where participants came together.

Table 4 presents the sequence and timescale of the ‘data collection’, ‘analysis of interviews and focus groups’, and ‘construction of focus group PowerPoint’

| September 2012 – January 2014 – Research Journal | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|-----|------|--|--------------------|--|--|-------------------------------|
| | Summer Term (academic year 2012 – 2013) | | | | School Holidays | Autumn Term (academic year 2013 – 2014) | | |
| | April | May | June | July | August | September | October | November |
| Castleton In the field | Interviews | | FG | Sym | | | | |
| In my study | Analyse interview transcripts - construct FG PowerPoint - analyse FG transcript - modify PowerPoint for FG & Sym | | | | | | | |
| Townmouth In the field | | | | | | | Parent FG and ECEC Practitioner FG | Teacher FG (a week later) Sym |
| In my study | | | | | | | Analyse FG transcripts and modify PowerPoints for FG and Sym | |
| | | | | July to thesis submission – analysis of data and collection of artefacts | | | | |

4.2.2 Table 4: Overview of The Collection and Analysis of Data

After my visits to the Castleton case, during the autumn and spring terms, of the 2012 – 2013 academic year, I recorded observations and conversations that related to my research in my research journal. I continued to write my research journal throughout and for a short period after the data collection process. Between April and July I moved back and forth between the field and my study. In the field I carried out the interviews, the focus groups and finally the symposium and in my study I analysed the transcripts. Themes and patterns identified in the interviews were presented in the focus group PowerPoint. After the focus groups the transcripts were analysed and the PowerPoint amended and then presented during the

symposium. The Townmouth data generating process started in October and ended in November of the 2013 – 2014 academic year. As no interviews were conducted in Townmouth, the first Castleton focus group PowerPoint was used to start the reflective conversation. It was my intention that the Townmouth participants' voices should be represented in the discussions. After each focus group the transcripts were analysed and the PowerPoint modified.

From July 2013 to the submission of the thesis I continued to analyse the data and collect artefacts, such as OfSTED reports, and the Southward LA school admission policy. The artefacts provided further insight into the issues raised during the interviews, focus groups and symposia.

4.3 Participants and Contexts

The neighbourhoods of each case were similar. Both were situated in white working class communities in the south west of England: the Indices of Multiple Deprivation states the Castleton neighbourhood is in one of the 5% of most deprived areas in England, and Townmouth is in the bottom 10% [Southwood County Council and NHS, 2011]. Residents may therefore experience many of the issues related to poverty, such as poor mental health, addiction, isolation and so forth.

In both cases the ECEC setting and a primary school shared the same site. Each ECEC setting and school had a separate entrance and a wooden fence between the ECEC setting and the school.

Castleton families and ECEC practitioners walked across the school KS1 playground to reach the gate to the entrance of the ECEC setting. The fence continued along a pathway behind the school and ECEC setting. The fence

enclosed the ECEC setting garden and at the end of the fence was another gate which led to the reception class outdoor area. This is the gate referred to by Sophie (Castleton, ECEC practitioner) in Section 6.1.2. Teachers, school personnel and ECEC practitioners could look over the wooden fence and gate and ECEC children could look between the slats in the wooden gate to the reception outdoor area and classroom door. The KS1 playground was used by the ECEC practitioners and children when the older children were in the classrooms.

Townmouth families and ECEC practitioners walked across the school carpark and down an enclosed pathway to the ECEC setting entrance. The wooden fence enclosing the pathway was taller than the adults. On the other side of the fence was the school field.

At the time of the data collection both ECEC settings were part of a SSCC. In Castleton the ECEC setting and SSCC were on split sites but in Townmouth the ECEC setting and SSCC shared the same building. The ECEC practitioners were employed by the LA and were line-managed by the leaders of SSCC; the reception teachers were line-managed by the head-teachers. In both cases some of the ECEC practitioners had worked in the preschools prior to the ECEC settings becoming part of the SSLP. The Townmouth ECEC manager had been the manager of the preschool. The Castleton ECEC manager had joined the setting since it became part of the SSCC. Sophie, the deputy, had been the manager of the preschool.

4.3.1 Castleton Participants

In Castleton many of the parents and all ECEC practitioners were aware that I was studying at University and would be carrying out research. Before I left my role as

SSCC teacher some parents and ECEC practitioners had shown an interest in taking part. These parents and ECEC practitioners were contacted to ask if they still wanted to be a participant in the research. Table 5 introduces the Castleton case participants.

| 9 Parents – 3 Fathers & 6 Mothers 8 families/children | | 6 ECEC practitioners | | | Teaching staff | | |
|---|--|------------------------------|--|------------------|---|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Name of parent & (child) | Setting/ school attended | Name & position | Qualification | Home location | Name, Position & school | Qualification | Home location |
| Samantha (Sophia) | ECEC setting to school in catchment area | Sophie deputy | Level 3 | Local | Phyllis Teacher - school in catchment | PGCE EY (QTS) | Beyond |
| Beth (Tim) | ECEC setting to school in catchment area | Lily practitioner | Level 3, 1 st yr ECEC Foundation degree | Local | Richard Teacher - school in catchment | SCITT EY (QTS) | Beyond |
| Simon (Isabel) | ECEC setting to school in catchment area | Amber practitioner | Level 3 | Local | 1 head- teacher school sharing site ECEC | | Beyond |
| Lynne (Alison) | ECEC setting to school sharing site | Clare practitioner | Level 3 | Local | 1 deputy head- teacher school sharing site ECEC | | Beyond |
| Janet (Robert) | Reception class - sch sharing site with ECEC | Annie practitioner | Level 3, 1 st yr ECEC Foundation Degree | Local | Ruth reception teacher school sharing site ECEC | BEd KS2 Biology | Beyond |
| Louise (Kieran) | Reception class - sch sharing site with ECEC | Flo manager | BA (hons) ECS MA Ed NPQICL | Beyond | Lara Reception teacher School sharing site ECEC | BEd EY (QTS) | |
| Ken Pool (Harry) | Reception class - Year 1 - school in catchment area | | | | 1 ECEC advisor | BEd EY (QTS) Studying MA Ed | Beyond |
| Rosie Pool (Harry) | Reception class - Year 1 - school in catchment area | | | | 1 SSCC manager | BA degree | Beyond |
| Liam (Danielle) | Reception class - Year 1 - school in catchment area | | | | | | |

4.3.1 Table 5: Castleton Participants

All parents, and all but the ECEC setting manager, lived in the local neighbourhood. Teachers and leaders of the SSCC/ECEC setting, school and LA lived outside the local neighbourhood. The ECEC setting manager had the Level 7 National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centres leadership qualification (NPQICL), all ECEC practitioners had a childcare qualification (level 3) and two of these ECEC practitioners were in their first year (level 4) of the Early Years Foundation degree (FdA). Not all teachers provided information about their qualifications but those that did held a teaching degree with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The SSCC manager had a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Education and the ECEC advisor had a teaching qualification and was studying for a Level 7 Masters in Education (MA Ed).

The head-teacher, deputy and the reception teachers taught in the primary school that shared the same site at the ECEC setting. Phyllis and Richard taught at another primary school in the local catchment area.

The parents' various accounts reflected their perspectives on preparations for the move and the support after the move. Four children were to start the reception class the following term; three children had been in reception for nearly a year and were about to start Year 1; one child was in a mixed aged reception and Year 1 class and one child was in Year 1 and would start Year 2 the following September. Both of Harry's parents took part in the research.

Ofsted inspections had judged the school that shared the site with the ECEC setting as 'inadequate'. The report stated 'Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' attainment and achievement throughout the school' (OfSTED, 2011:4). The ECEC setting had been judged as 'outstanding' (OfSTED, 2009).

4.3.2 Townmouth Participants

Table 6 introduces the parents, ECEC practitioners and teacher from the second case, Townmouth.

| 4 Parents | | 3 ECEC practitioners | | | Teachers and training of teachers | | |
|----------------------|--|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Name of parent | Setting /school | Name & position | Qualification | Home location | Name & position | Qualification | Home location |
| Lucy (Poppy) | ECEC setting – moving to school sharing site next year | Mary (ECEC manager) | Level 3 | Local | Heidi | B Ed (QTS) | Beyond |
| Carrie (Cory) | Reception From ECEC setting on school site | Dawn (deputy) | Level 3 | Local | Ann | BA Ed (QTS) | Beyond |
| David (Logan) | Reception From ECEC setting on school site | Elizabeth (practitioner) | Level 3 | Local | Sarah | PGCE (QTS) | Beyond |
| Anna (Logan) | As above | | | | Poppy | SCITT | Local |

4.3.2 Table 6: Townmouth Participants

All parents and ECEC practitioners lived in the local neighbourhood. Three teachers lived beyond the local geographical community. The fourth teacher who did live in the community was a trainee teacher on School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT). Three of the four teachers worked in the primary school that shared the site with the ECEC and one teacher (Ann) came from another primary

in the catchment area. All ECEC practitioners had a childcare qualification (Level 3) and three teachers had a teaching qualification while one was working towards their teaching qualification.

Heidi, the reception teacher, had until recently been the SSCC teacher, but due to the changes in SSCCs, as discussed in Section 1.3, had recently started a new job as a reception teacher in the primary school. Prior to her role as SSCC teacher, Heidi had worked as a supply teacher in the school at which she is currently employed. This was Sarah's first year working in the reception class. Previously she had worked in a Year 1 class.

Three parents had children who had attended the ECEC setting and had started school in the September of the current academic year and one had a child who was attending the ECEC setting and starting school the following year.

There were two reception class each with 19 children. The reception class area is a large open plan space with large garden which is open throughout the morning and afternoon sessions. The ECEC setting is an open plan room with a large outdoor area, which is open throughout the sessions.

OfSTED had judged the school as a 'good' school and the ECEC setting a 'good' ECEC setting.

A distinguishing feature of the case study is Heidi and her professional career. Over the past seven years she had been a part of SSCC leadership team, establishing and developing practices in the SSCC. This had enabled her and the ECEC practitioners to establish relationships and construct practices together. As this role

was to become redundant she secured a role as a member of the school leadership team and reception teacher.

4.4 Participation During the Research Phases

Table 7 summarises which Castleton participants took part in each phase of the research. The data generating process happened during the summer term before the children’s move to the next stage of their schooling trajectory.

| Parents | Interviews | Focus group | Symposium | ECEC practitioners | Interviews | Focus group | Symposium | Teachers | Interviews | Focus group | Symposium |
|----------|------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| Samantha | √ | | | Sophie | √ | √ | √ | Phyllis | √ | | |
| Beth | √ | √ | | Lily | √ | √ | √ | Richard | √ | | |
| Simon | √ | √ | | Amber | √ | | | 1 head-teacher | | | √ |
| Lynne | √ | √ | √ | Clare | √ | √ | | 1 deputy head-teacher | | | √ |
| Louise | √ | √ | √ | Annie | √ | √ | √ | 2 reception teachers | | | √ |
| Janet | √ | √ | √ | Flo | √ | √ | √ | 1 EY advisor | | | √ |
| Ken | √ | | | | | | | 1 SSCC manager | | | √ |
| Rosie | √ | √ | | | | | | | | | |
| Liam | √ | √ | | | | | | | | | |

4.4 Table 7: Castleton Participant Involvement

Nine Castleton parents were interviewed. Seven parents attended the focus groups and three attended the symposium. Six ECEC practitioners were interviewed. Five took part in the focus groups and four ECEC practitioners attended the symposium. Two teachers were interviewed. They did not work at the school that shared the same site as the ECEC setting but at another school in the catchment area. No teacher took part in the focus groups. Two reception teachers, one head-teacher, one deputy head-teacher, EY advisor and SSCC Manager attended the symposium. All the teachers worked in the school that shared the same site as the ECEC setting.

Table 8 summarises Townmouth participants' involvement in each phase of the research. The data generating process happened during the second half of the autumn term after children had moved to the reception class.

| Parents | Focus group | Symposium | ECEC practitioners | Focus group | Symposium | Teachers | Focus group | Symposium |
|---------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|-------------|-----------|
| Lucy | √ | | Mary | √ | √ | Heidi | √ | √ |
| Carrie | √ | | Dawn | √ | √ | Ann | √ | √ |
| David | √ | | Elizabeth | √ | | Sarah | √ | |
| Anna | √ | √ | | | | Poppy | √ | |

4.4 Table 8: Townmouth Participant Involvement

Four parents took part in the focus group and one attended the symposium. Three ECEC practitioners attended the focus group and two the symposium. Four teachers took part in the focus group and two in the symposium.

All parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, from both cases, agreed to be audio-recorded during their interviews, focus groups and symposia.

4.5 Methods

4.5.1 Interviews

The data generation process began by carrying out individual interviews. The interviews provided an opportunity to gain an insight into the participants' 'experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings' (May, 2011:131) about transitions, including those of participants who were perhaps less confident to talk in front of others. Listening to each person's account of their experiences and beliefs about transitions was an important aspect of the research practice. The relational practice of listening to participants aimed to demonstrate that I was genuinely interested in participants' experiences (Dutton & Duckerisch, 2006).

Prior to interviewing participants I had carried out two pilot interviews, one with a HEI colleague and the other with a friend. Both were critical of the ordering of the questions and of the terminology used. These were revised accordingly (Appendix 1). All participants were given copies of the questions with the project information sheet a week before their individual interview. I wanted to provide participants with as much information as possible so that they had an awareness of what was going to be asked of them, which I hoped would put them at ease. The information sheet (Appendix 2) explained to participants that the interviews would not last more than an hour and the interviews were going to be audio recorded.

I decided to use semi-structured questions during the interviews. The semi-structured questions afforded 'guided conversations' (Yin, 2009:106), which provided a focus for the discussion whilst not constraining participants. As

mentioned above my role was not to lead the interviews but to provide an opportunity for participants to describe their experiences, beliefs, attitudes and thoughts. Occasionally I did reflect back comments about an issue the participant was discussing, which encouraged them to elaborate further.

4.5.2 Focus Groups

Often, during a focus group, the researcher asks questions that focus on the specific issue to a small group of participants (Bryman, 2012). This method provides the researcher with deeper insights into the issue he/she is exploring, as participants not only respond to the researcher's questions but also to the comments made by the other participants (Bryman, 2012). Instead of questioning participants, I structured the focus groups so that participants could engage in a reflective conversation. The PowerPoint (Appendix 3) included emerging patterns and themes from the individual interviews, academic theory, policy and politicians' speeches about school readiness and transitions. The PowerPoint was a tool to support the reflective conversations.

I drew upon my insider knowledge of the Castleton context when designing the focus groups. As a SSCC teacher I had encouraged parents and ECEC practitioners to engage in the process of critical reflection during workshops and INSET days when planning experiences for children in the home and ECEC setting. When engaging in these reflective conversations parents and ECEC practitioners were familiar with the process of foregrounding their beliefs and tacit knowledge (Eraut, 2007) and making the 'familiar strange' (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002:23).

These conversations were also audio-recorded and I returned to my study to analyse the data that I had collected. The developing themes and issues were added to the PowerPoint, (Appendix 4).

4.5.3 Symposium

The organisation of the symposium was similar to that of the focus groups. The term 'Symposium' was used to distinguish this focus group from the previous focus groups. The previous focus groups had comprised separate groups of parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, but the symposium brought members of these groups together. The symposium provided opportunities for 'individuals to collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meaning around it' (Bryman, 2012: 504). The symposium also provided the opportunity, for me as researcher, to gain an insight into how participants made sense of preparing and supporting children during the transition together.

Focus groups are viewed as minimising the power relations between the researcher and participants, as the role of the researcher is as a 'facilitator' of the discussion (Bryman, 2012:504). I also viewed the focus groups as a method that would minimise the power relations between participants. Often participants who perceive themselves as having less power and influence can be silenced during research (Bryman, 2012; Finch, 1984). Whilst it was intended that the design of the research provided opportunities for these participants to become familiar with the research expectations and processes, I was still conscious that reflecting and discussing issues with others from different groups during the symposium could be difficult. Therefore comments from all interview participants and those who took part in the focus groups were represented in the PowerPoint. This enabled participants' voices

to be heard and read. Participants were able to learn about each other's experiences, which provided insight into each other's alternative beliefs and practices, whilst also offering opportunities to find commonalities.

4.5.4 Research Journal

I kept a research journal during the period September 2012 to January 2014. During the autumn and spring terms I used my journal to document observations and the comments that I heard during my visits, and also to make notes from my reading about research design and transitions. My research journal was also a tool to support the process of 'systematic reflection' (Harland, 2014:1115), in order to become aware of my 'subjective understandings and ontological assumptions' (Harland, 2014:1115), during the both the design stages and during the data generating process. For example, in my research journal on the 22nd November 2012 I wrote:

'Back, L (2007) The Art of Listening, wrote how researchers in the process of listening to the participants steal stories from them. How do I deal with this?'

The process of documenting my concerns and the systematic reflection supported me in designing case study research that aligned with my views of participants and learning. This was discussed in section 4.1 and 4.2.

The journal was particularly useful when I encountered emotive incidences during the data generation process, which at the time limited my ability to look beneath and beyond the situation. One such incident was the lack of communication from teachers in Castleton. I recorded this incident and my frustrations in my journal. In time I was able to engage in the process of reflection to challenge my initial view of

the situation, and to consider other possible reasons why the teachers may not engage in the research process. This is discussed further in section 4.7.

I also used my journal to record information that I found out after the interviews and focus groups. For instance, during the Townmouth parent focus group, David explained the ECEC practitioners and children visited the school. I asked Heidi about the visits after the focus group and then recorded her comments in my journal. In Chapter 6, Section 6.2.2 I presented data from my journal to provide further insight into the comments made by participants.

Finally the research journal was one of the tools that I used to keep an audit trail of the research process.

4.5.5 Artefacts

Presentational artefacts present information to the people in the field (Plowright, 2011). The artefacts I collected included information and policies from the LA websites, school websites and the internet sites to which the school webpages were linked. These artefacts provided further information about events discussed by participants during interviews, focus groups and symposium; for example, during her interview Louise (Castleton, parent) mentioned that she had taken part in a bread making course at school with her son (see Section 8.1.1). The bread making course webpage provided information about who led the course and the purpose of the course.

4.6 Research Environment

The spaces where data was generated were purposefully chosen and planned. Dutton and Dukerich (2006:6) encourage researchers to reflect on their 'relational

practices that undergird research projects', as they argue the research relationships influence the quality of the data. I believed it was necessary to consider the physical environment, as the physical environment sets the context of the relational environment. For instance, in the Castleton Context I organised two smaller focus groups for both parents and ECEC practitioners instead of one large focus group, as I decided that there would be more opportunities for participants to engage in discussion in smaller groups. The focus groups were also planned to familiarise participants with the expectations of a focus group and to foster their confidence in exploring ideas in a group of familiar people before discussing these in the symposium with others who had different roles when supporting children. The rooms where the research took place were also familiar to participants. The interviews and focus groups for Castleton case parents and ECEC practitioners were carried out in the ECEC setting's family room during the day and the teacher interviews in their classrooms after school. The symposium took place in the SSCC family room, which was also familiar to participants. In the Townmouth case the teachers' focus groups happened after school in the reception classroom. The parents' and ECEC practitioners' focus groups and the symposium happened during the day in the SSCC family room.

Funding from the HEI research fund was sought to cover the supply costs of ECEC practitioners and the childcare cost for parents. Covering these costs enabled them to take part in the research. It was thought unnecessary to apply for funding to cover teachers' supply costs as the interviews and focus groups were scheduled for after school. The Castleton symposium was also scheduled for after school but the Townmouth symposium happened during the school day when the teachers had non-contact time.

I chose to use a PowerPoint as a tool to guide the participants' conversation. Participants and I sat in a semi-circle facing the wall where the PowerPoint was projected. The projector was on a low table, which we sat around. The layout of the room and the PowerPoint enabled me sit alongside participants as they referred to the Powerpoint. I hoped that positioning myself alongside participants would limit my role in leading and dominating the discussion, but instead enabled me to listen to the participants. As I listened to the content of the conversations, I also listened for pauses in the discussion, and I observed carefully participants' body language for indications that the discussion was waning and it was time to move the PowerPoint to the next slide. The layout of the room was similar in all focus groups and the Townmouth symposium. The Castleton symposium, however, was in a larger room and there were more participants. The size of the room and numbers of participants prevented me from sitting alongside the group. Instead I sat in front of the participants. In this context there was less discussion amongst participants.

My decisions when planning the layout of the room and design of the research methods were likely to reduce my involvement in the discussions, but I was aware that I had influenced the discussions. I had chosen the comments on the slide and made the decision when the PowerPoint presentation and discussion was moved on.

4.7 Gate-keepers, Gaining Access and Research Relationships

Dutton & Duckerich (2006:26) view the 'relational foundation of research as a feeder and enabler of the overall quality of a research project'. My role in the SSCC had enabled me to establish a professional relationship with all participants. I was not a stranger to the gate-keepers or participants. As a student on a professional

doctorate and an insider researcher one might suppose that gaining consent to carry out research in the context where I worked was unproblematic. This was not the case and during the process of gaining access I had to be flexible (Robson, 2011) and resilient. In each case there were three 'gate-keepers' to seek access to participants; these were the SSCC manager, the ECEC setting manager and the head-teachers. Gaining access to the parents and ECEC practitioners via their gate-keepers was unproblematic, but access to teachers was not straightforward. I had decided to contact the head-teachers of the schools at which the children would be starting in the following September. My rationale for contacting these head-teachers was, I had hoped the research process would be useful and beneficial to them and to the reception teachers that worked in their schools. Not only did the research process provided an opportunity for me to hear the reception teachers' views but also further opportunities for them to meet and discuss children's transition to school with prospective parents and with the ECEC practitioners who were preparing children for the transition.

Throughout the summer term I tried to contact the Castleton head-teachers by telephone, email, letter, visiting the school, and sending an invitation to the symposium but no head-teacher replied to confirm or decline the invitation to take part in the research. I did manage to gain access to Richard and Phyllis and took the opportunity to invite them to be a part of the research. Both Richard and Phyllis had been trainee student teachers in the ECEC setting and I had been their placement supervisor. Despite the other teachers not responding to my communication I decided to invite them to the Symposium as I had explained in the initial letters this was part of the research process. I also wanted participants to contribute to the discussion in a way that suited them. The head-teacher, deputy

head and two reception class teachers from the school that shared the site with the ECEC setting did attend. After the symposium I emailed each teacher to thank them for attending and asked if they had any comments, thoughts or considerations they would like to contribute to the research about transitions or school readiness. No teacher replied. I then contacted Heidi⁶ (Townmouth, teacher) who agreed to take part and also introduced me to other reception teachers. These teachers agreed to engage in the research the following term.

In Castleton gaining access to teachers became 'a political process' (Bryman, 2012:151). 'Gate-keepers' can withhold consent, as they can be weary of the researchers' motivation, benefits or losses for the organisation' (Bryman, 2012:151). Moreover, the head-teachers may have been anxious that the research could put their teams under further anxiety and scrutiny. Recently, all the invited schools in Castleton had been in special measures and were now judged as either inadequate or required to improve by OfSTED. There could also have been 'complex power dynamics' (Miller & Bell, 2012:63) between the school and ECEC setting or between myself and teachers, as the ECEC setting in which I had worked had been graded as 'outstanding' (OfSTED, 2009). A further complexity in the power relationships, particularly with the school that shared the same site as the ECEC setting, was that, until recently, all members of the ECEC setting leadership team had a Masters level qualification; both teachers were embarking on doctoral research, and the ECEC manager and myself taught in HEIs. We were not typical ECEC practitioners and could be viewed by others as challenging the conventional view of the low status of ECEC practitioners. If the school teachers held views of us as being 'challenging'

⁶ Heidi and I had both been SSCC teachers and Heidi had also been a participant in my Masters research.

these could have contributed to the fragile relationships between the school and ECEC setting, but could also possibly explain why the teachers did not engage in the research.

Unlike the Castleton teachers, the Castleton parents and the ECEC practitioners appeared to be keen to take part in the research. An explanation for this is that, for those who belong to groups which are less likely to be listened to, the research process afforded an opportunity to share their stories (Finch, 1984). This can then be an enjoyable and valued activity for them (Finch, 1984). The existing relationships between myself and the Castleton parents and ECEC practitioners was also a feature that enabled these participants to be involved in the research. To discuss their experiences ECEC practitioners and parents would have to trust me to present their contributions in a manner that would not be detrimental to them or the children. Finch (1984) argues that researchers who have an emotional and relational commitment to their research participants are influential and responsible for promoting less powerful groups' interests. Being strongly motivated by a sense of social justice, I am comfortable that my research is a tool to enable these groups to be heard. This might have had the unfortunate consequence that teachers could then view me as having a bias in favour of the parents and ECEC practitioners; which could be another contributing factor in their limited participation. Where the professional relationships had been based upon mutual respect, trust and collaboration the research relationships naturally evolved, but where the professional relationships had been distant and strained it was difficult to gain access to establish positive research relationships.

4.8 Ethics

All ethical decisions were made in line with guidelines from Plymouth University and the ethical protocol agreed by the Faculty of Health, Education and Society Ethics Committee. There were three particular ethical issues with which I considered. These were:

- Making explicit my role as a researcher
- Avoiding any suggestion of deceit or coercion
- Avoiding appearing to put any participant into a subordinate position in relation to myself or to each other

4.8.1 Making Explicit My Role as a Researcher

I left my role as SSCC teacher in August 2012, but did not intend to carry out the interviews and focus groups until the following summer term. I believed it was important to maintain contact with the ECEC practitioners and parents as I did not want my actions to be viewed as using the participants purely for research purposes. During the autumn term of 2012 to the end of the period of data collection, I visited the ECEC setting as often as my HEI work commitments allowed. Maintaining contact with participants before the interviews and focus groups required me to apply for approval of my ethics protocol in a staged process. The first application was related to field work during the visits in the autumn and spring terms. In the spring term I applied for ethical approval for the interviews, focus groups and symposia.

Whilst carrying out the field work it was important and necessary to ensure that participants were aware that I was no longer a SSCC teacher but a researcher and

that during my visits the observations I made and the conversations I had could be used in the research. A recommendation for the first stage by the Ethics Committee was that I display a poster with my picture and an explanation that I was acting as a researcher. The poster was displayed each time I was in the building. Revisiting my research journal I became aware that I had also changed my interactions with children, ECEC practitioners and parents. In my research journal I wrote on 25th May 2013

I feel guilty as I am not on the floor working with practitioners but could this be inappropriate?

When writing this I was unaware of why I did not visit the ECEC setting floor⁷. Instead I stayed in the family room or staff room. This decision was motivated by an unconscious concern, which at the time I was not able to articulate. Reflecting on my account I now believe there were two reasons for this action. The first was that if I had continued to work on the floor this could have placed the ECEC practitioners in a subordinate position, as it could be viewed that I believed they 'needed' my help. The second was an action to support my transition. I had changed my behaviours when I visited the ECEC setting which reinforced to me as well as to others that my role was now as a researcher. It was not only the ECEC practitioners and parents that had to adjust to this change but also myself.

Throughout the doctoral journey my position on the insider/outsider continuum shifted. At the beginning of the doctorate I was an insider researcher, but during the thesis stage of the doctorate I moved from being an ECEC practitioner to an outsider as a researcher. Since leaving my role as an ECEC practitioner and embarking

⁷ 'Floor' was the term that the ECEC practitioner team used when discussing the rooms where the children played.

upon my doctoral thesis I became a full-time lecturer in an HEI and an apprentice researcher. This journey posed personal challenges for me and the ethical protocol had created a framework in which the roles were made clearer for both the participants and myself.

4.8.2 Avoiding Any Suggestion of Deceit or Coercion

In each case there were different issues to consider in order to avoid any suggestion of deceit or coercion. The different issues arose due to the different qualities of relationships I had with participants. Some may argue that the relationships I had with the Castleton parents, ECEC practitioners and with Heidi could in fact coerce these participants into taking part in the research (Bryman, 2012; Miller & Bell, 2012). Whilst I do recognise that this may be the case, I also believed that the relationships gave participants confidence to decline taking part or only to take part in the phases of the research of their choice. From their past experiences of working with me parents and ECEC practitioners knew I would not judge them or think negatively of them if they did not take part in the research. Any possibility of participants responding to some form of coercion would also have been reduced by the fact that I had by then left the setting and I was not as involved in the daily lives of the participants. My professional relationship with them was consequently less of a reason for them to take part in the research. I was able to reasonably presume that one reason why they were motivated to take part was because they enjoyed being involved in research.

My friendship with Heidi (Townmouth teacher) provided access to the gate-keepers and participants in Townmouth. The gate keepers included the head-teacher, SSCC manager and ECEC manager. In this case I had more distant relationships with the

other participants than I had with the participants in the Castleton case. There was less likelihood that I as a researcher would coerce Townmouth participants or that there would be any sense of obligation amongst the participants to take part. Instead the gate-keepers, particularly Heidi, SSCC manager and ECEC manager, may have coerced the participants to take part in the research (Miller & Bell, 2012). Participants may have felt obligated to take part in the research as their leaders and managers had invited them to take part. I had to hold this in mind, if participants felt coerced into taking part, they may have been reluctant to contribute to the discussions, which I had to respect. I also had to acknowledge that the gate-keepers decided who to ask to take part in the research and that this may have prevented others who wanted to be involved from taking part.

4.8.3 Avoiding appearing to put any Participant into a Subordinate Position in Relation to Myself or to Each Other

When considering the issue of research with 'vulnerable groups' I was aware that the parents who participated in the research could be deemed as vulnerable as they lived in an area of high deprivation. My experiences of listening and being with the parents had limited my 'reactivity' (Robson, 2011:157) to their views of the world and I was less likely to categorise groups as 'vulnerable' (Robson, 2011:211). Nevertheless, I was conscious that the power relationships between the groups could limit opportunities to talk, or even silence people's voices. These insights shaped the design of the case study. The interviews were an opportunity for all participants to be heard. The focus groups provided a space for participants to discuss their personal ideas and construct meanings with their immediate colleagues before discussing them with others from different groups in the symposium.

At the ethical application stage I ticked the box marked 'vulnerable' on the ethics form with caution, as I was aware that ethics is not a simple exercise. Ethical issues continued throughout the data generation (Miller & Bell, 2012), particularly in relation to participants' vulnerability. It became apparent during the process that, in the Castleton Context, all participants, regardless of the group to which they belonged, appeared vulnerable at times. Their vulnerability depended on the stage and context of the research. For instance, when Flo discussed her experiences of changes during the individual interview she became upset and started to cry. At the end of an hour she was still visibly upset and had only answered the first question. I decided to end the interview and stayed with her until she was feeling stronger. She was concerned that she had not completed the other questions so I suggested answering them on paper and then giving them to me. In this way I sought to be aware, reflexive (Miller & Bell, 2012) and responsive to her vulnerable emotional state. At the time of applying for ethical application it was not considered that a professional participant with a high level of education and good understanding of the research process, such as Flo, would be deemed as vulnerable, but in this context and discussing her experiences of change with me she clearly was.

Despite the planning of the research process there was less conversation between the participants during the symposium in the Castleton context. I recorded in my journal on the July 13th 2013:

Unfortunately there was not much discussion so it [the symposium] felt like a presentation...

ECEC practitioners also told me after the symposium that they found it difficult to discuss issues in this context. In my journal I recorded on July 13th 2013:

Lily said she was worried to say too much in the symposium as 'she did not want to get it wrong. It was unnerving as [the head-teacher] had lost her voice and I didn't know what she was writing down'. [The head-teacher was writing during the symposium]

The involvement of the head-teacher, who had lost her voice, caused Lily to be concerned she might say something wrong and was aware that the teacher was making notes. The note taking contributed to Lily's concern as she was not aware of what the head-teacher was writing about. This could also explain why I felt I was making a presentation. I was filling the silences and uncomfortable moments.

Although Lily appeared to be wary of discussing issues in front of teachers there is a possibility that the teachers also felt vulnerable. In my research journal I recorded on June 15th 2013: 'they remind me of 'so called hard to reach families', as they did not reply to research invitation'. I spent time reflecting upon why it was not possible for them to communicate or engage in the whole research process. In Section 4.4 I have discussed challenges in their professional lives and their relationship with myself that could have made them vulnerable and so precluded them from taking part in the research.

4.9 Making Sense of the Data

My contribution to academia and ECEC practice is the conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School'. The development of this conceptual framework has been discussed in Sections 2.2 and 2.4 and represented in Figure 7 and Figure 8. Following is a discussion of how the conceptual framework guided the analysis of the data.

This case study was typical of qualitative research as it generated rich data in large quantities and the analysis process started before the end of the data collection

process (Robson, 2011). The audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed by an administrative assistant. To reintroduce myself to the data and to check for accuracies I read the transcripts, whilst listening to the audio recordings. This activity also enabled me to record on the transcripts incidents that had happened during the interviews/focus group/symposium, for example, disturbances or anything I recalled that was significant, such as the participants' tone of voice when talking or laughing. I also recorded on the transcripts the number of the PowerPoint slide that was being discussed by the participants. When all transcripts had been checked for accuracies the transcripts were uploaded into the computer assisted software, NVivo.

The software NVivo was a useful tool not only to store the data but also to support the process of 'playing' with the data (Yin, 2009:129). This process consisted of coding and categorising the data (Yin, 2009). Initially the data was coded and categorised into the skills, knowledge and behaviours children required to be in the state of 'school readiness' and how participants prepared children to be ready. It soon became apparent from the discussions that parents and ECEC practitioners were preparing children for the transition to the reception class and teachers were preparing children for Year 1. These comments are also reflected in the analysis of the EYFS framework (DfE, 2012) in Section 2.4 and supported the development of the conceptual framework. Both transitions are represented on the model 'The Relational Transition to School', 2.4 Figure 8.

After categorising the data into the activities that prepared children to be in the state of readiness it became apparent that participants were preparing for the transition to school nearly a year beforehand. This then became the first phase of the transition. Three other phases were identified. The four phases during the transition

were: Phase 1, a year prior to the move from the beginning of the autumn term to the end of the spring term; Phase 2, during the summer term before the move to the reception class; Phase 3, from the children's first day in the reception class to the end of the autumn term, and finally Phase 4, during the spring and summer term before the move to Year 1. These phases became part of 'The Relational Transition to School', Figure 8. The conceptual framework then provided the 'descriptive framework' (Yin, 2009:131), in which the data could be sorted into chronological order.

The second analytical strategy used to make sense of the data drew upon the 'theoretical proposition' (Yin, 2009:36) that relationships between the adults preparing and supporting children during the transition to school changed (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta 2000). At this stage Nvivo became less frequently used. To focus my attention on the qualities of the relationships I engaged in the iterative process of moving back and forth between the data, policy and academic literature about the relationships. When analysing the data I focused on the qualities of the informal and formal interactions, the opportunities for sharing information, how and what information was being shared/discussed and whom the information was being shared/discussed between.

4.10 Limitations of Case Study Research

Researchers who carry out fixed-design research critique case studies, as they perceive limitations of such studies as not having a standard measure to assess the 'reliability and validity' of the research (Robson, 2001:155). Whilst I believe it is important that readers of this research are confident in the quality of the data and the approaches used for analysis, I do not believe it is appropriate to ensure the

credibility of the research by meeting the expectations of fixed design research. Instead I turn to Guban and Lincoln's (cited in Bryman, 2012:390) criteria for evaluating the study; these are 'trustworthiness and authenticity'.

Trustworthiness includes four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman, 2012). The first, credibility, acknowledges there are 'multiple accounts of social reality' (Bryman, 2012:390). In this case study multiple views of parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, were sought through interviews, focus groups and a symposium. To confirm my insights into these people's social worlds there were various opportunities for respondent validation (Bryman, 2012):

- After individual interviews participants were provided copies of their transcripts so they could check for accuracy and amend or withdraw data.
- The participants' discussions during focus groups and the symposium confirmed or offered other ways of interpreting the data.
- The relationships that I had with many of the research participants enabled me to contact them via email or telephone to check for meanings and accuracy of my interpretation of the data during the analysis and writing up stage of the thesis.

A second criterion is transferability of findings to other contexts (Bryman, 2012). This case study did not aim to find a universal truth but instead intended to gain insights into the phenomena being explored in a particular context (Robson, 2011; Yin, 2009). These insights are specific to the context explored at the time the data was gathered. In Section 1.3 it was explained that the ECEC sector is a diverse sector, as ECEC provision has roots in a range of providers with different aims and expectations. In both cases the ECEC settings had similar developmental trajectories. Both ECEC settings had started as a voluntary preschool. Between 2000 – 2003 the preschools extended the hours and the ages of children that

attended the setting to provide the care and education element of the SSLP and then a SSCC. In line with LA policy the children of the parents that took part in the research moved from the ECEC setting to a school reception class in the September after their fourth birthday. The findings of this case study provide insights into the parents', the ECEC practitioners' and the teachers' beliefs and relationships, during the transition to school in this context. These insights can then contribute to the wider debate about the beliefs and relationships of those supporting children during the transition to school.

The third criterion to work towards is dependability. Dependability of the study required me to keep an audit of my research journey by keeping records of the participants, transcripts and data analysis. My research journal was also a tool used to document the research journey and issues that arose. These were further explored through the process of reflection. My supervisors acted as critical colleagues who challenged my decisions during supervisory meetings. They also contributed to the confirmability of the research which is the fourth criterion of trustworthiness. Our critical discussions worked towards minimising my biases and 'subjective judgements' (Yin, 2009:41) in the shaping of the research design and analysis (Bryman, 2012).

Authenticity is concerned with the political influence of research (Bryman, 2012). In Section 4.1 I discussed how, as a teacher and researcher, I am motivated to promote social justice. When designing the research process a key aim of mine was to provide an opportunity/space for those who participated in the research to hear each other's perspectives and learn from each other. The research design aimed to provide an opportunity for participants who were less likely to be listened to to

share their beliefs and experiences of supporting children during the transition to school.

4.11 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the design of the research, carrying out the data collection and the analysis of the data. The discussions during interviews, focus groups and symposia about children's school readiness and transitions illuminated 'unexpected or unanticipated' (Robson, 2011:283) insights into parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs and their relationships during the transition to school. These are presented and discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 5 - Beliefs about School Readiness and Starting School

5 Introduction

.....I can't sit here and give you a list of ten things children need to be able to do from the day they start school. I think they need to be happy and able to be confident in that environment (Interview, Richard, teacher, Castleton)

The confusion that prevails around defining school readiness in the international academic, political and practice communities is also apparent in Richard's comment, and in the comments of other participants. Analysis of the data, however, found that there were parallels between the participants' comments and the expectations of the EYFS (DfE, 2012a). For instance, there are two points during the EYFS at which children are expected to be in the state of readiness; ready for the move to the school reception class and ready for the move to formal learning in Year 1. Instead of just focusing on the preparations and children's readiness for school Richard also refers to children's adjustment to school. He mentions that children require the necessary dispositions and attitudes to be confident in the reception class. Richard seems to have an implicit belief that children's readiness is only part of the transition to school and that there is also a period of adjustment. In this chapter participants' discussions about starting school, school readiness, adjusting to school and their experiences of preparing and supporting children for each of the transitions are presented.

5.1 When to Start School – Changing Admission Policies

In both the Castleton and Townmouth contexts all the children had started or were about to start the school reception class at the beginning of the September after their fourth birthday.

.....they have got to go to school so when they get to a certain age they go to school (Interview, Louise, parent, Castleton)

I think, mainly that, everyone knows that they have to go to school...I don't think anybody questions or tells you, you know oh they are going to school this year. (Interview, Liam, parent, Castleton)

Louise's and Liam's accounts are consistent with the local practices. In this context starting school the September after the child's fourth birthday is an unsaid and unchallenged expectation by these parents. Even when Lynne was offered the possibility for Alison to start school in the January instead of September Lynne preferred Alison to start in the September.

We had the choice to defer Alison till January because of all the medical problems. I just felt it wasn't for her, because she is already nearly five when she goes to school. She would be five years and three months.....when she goes to school in January. But I just agreed with the school that I would try and get as much sorted before she goes to school. I didn't see the point in putting her back and also she should go with all her friends... I don't want her to be a social outcast. (Interview, Lynne, parent, Castleton)

The social expectation that children start school the September after their fourth birthday had influenced Lynne's decision not to delay Alison's school starting date. Lynne did not want her daughter to be different from her peers when starting school. Not only would Alison be different starting school after Christmas but she would be five years old. Lynne explained that if Alison started school at five years old she could be viewed as being held back. To ensure Alison was ready for school in the September Lynne had accepted the expectations of the school teachers and put in place the necessary strategies to support her daughter's medical problems before

starting school. Not being ready to start school in September could position both Alison and Lynne as not meeting the expected requirements of them; Alison in her learning and development and Lynne in her parenting.

ECEC practitioners recalled that starting school in the September after children's fourth birthday had not always been the expected pattern. Mary, Elizabeth and Dawn discussed that there had been two intakes during the year when children could start school.

The two tier umm. (Focus group, Mary, practitioner, Townmouth)

.....the Easter intake and the September intake. (Focus group, Elizabeth, practitioner, Townmouth)

That's not really encouraged now though, is it? Although they have the choice. (Focus group, Dawn, practitioner, Townmouth)

Flo and Sophie also referred to different admission patterns during their discussion about their past practices of preparing children for school.

Well did you twenty years ago have a rising five session? Which was for all your children going to school. (Focus Group, Flo, practitioner, Castleton)

We didn't have a rising five [session]. But definitely the children that were going to school would have some more input and we used to have to chuck them out into the hallway and do two and threes together. But that was mainly around writing their name... ..that sort of thing.... Making sure they could count and things like that. (Focus Group, Sophie, practitioner, Castleton)

In Townmouth there had been two intakes; one in the September and the other at Easter. Children were more likely to be 4 ½ years old when starting school. In the ECEC setting in which Flo had worked she had provided rising five sessions for children who were about to start school. Under this admission policy children were nearly five years old as they had their fifth birthday during the first term they attended school. There were three points of entry to the reception class. The ECEC

practitioners' comments concur with those in the earlier discussion about school starting age in Section 1.6. In the late 1980s, depending on the local context and the admission policies, children could start school at different times during the year which they were four years old. Dawn had awareness that there are inconsistencies between national/local policies and practice. The former suggest that parents have choices when their children start school, but in practice it is not encouraged.

The changes in the admission policy had implications for these ECEC practitioners as they had changed their practices. Mary discussed how she had previously prepared children for school.

It was being able to know your colours, write your name, sit down with your legs crossed, line up, that sort of thing. Whereas, now it's more preparing the child in a wholesome manner. (Focus group, Mary, practitioner, Townmouth)

Mary explained that the expectations of them and the children had changed. These changes are reflected in Flo's and Sophie's discussion above. Flo's description of the 'rising fives session' and Sophie's reference to the 'children that were going to school would have some more input', suggest they planned groups and activities that focused on academic skills, knowledge and behaviours for school. Instead, Mary explains the preparation today focuses on the 'wholesome' nature of children's development, such as children's cognitive, affective and attitudinal domains of learning and development.

The references, made by all the ECEC practitioners, about preparing children for academic learning at school were made when discussing the previous school admission policies. The children starting school were generally older than those currently; children were between 4 ½ years and nearly five years old when they started school, and those starting in the spring and summer term had less time in

the reception class before they started the KS1 NC in Year 1. Under the current local admission policy, discussed in Section 1.6, the children born after Christmas are younger when they start school and all children have a whole academic year in the reception class before they start the KS1 NC in Year 1. The standardised school starting date for children has led to Castleton and Townmouth ECEC practitioners changing their expectations of children's school readiness and how they prepare children.

5.2 'Ready for School' 'Ready for Year 1' and 'School Readiness'

When discussing slide 12, (Appendix 3), which posed the questions 'When should they be school ready? At the beginning of the reception year? Or when they have to attend school?' Sophie commented.

I suppose it depends on what part of school ready you're talking about at reception. I think when they leave here, they should be able to do those things like getting dressed and take themselves to the toilet. But possibly, maybe writing their name should be, once they've had that year in reception. (Focus group, Sophie, practitioner, Castleton)

Sophie had used the term school ready to apply to the transition to the reception class and then a year later when starting Year 1. The term school ready can be used at either transition but have different expectations of the children, which Sophie explained as independence in their personal care when starting the reception class and academic skills at the end of the reception year. Sophie was the only participant who had explicitly explained that there were two points when children had to be school ready during the EYFS, but similar perceptions were reflected in other participants' discussions about their and each other's roles and practices.

Dawn and Elizabeth discussed their role and how they prepared children for the transition to the reception class:

I remember being told by our Early Year's Teacher we are not here to teach them what they need for school..... We are just here to guide them and the rest they will learn in the reception class.... (Focus group, Dawn, practitioner, Townmouth)

....emotionally prepared and.....(Focus group, Elizabeth, practitioner, Townmouth)

.....confident... ..Umm, happy in their own skin... (Focus group, Dawn, practitioner, Townmouth)

The ECEC teacher that is referred to is Heidi who had previously worked with these ECEC practitioners in the ECEC setting. Dawn and Elizabeth explained their role was to foster children's attitudes and dispositions for the present and not just for preparation for school. These remarks reflect their colleague's Mary's earlier comment about preparing children in a 'wholesome manner'.

Phyllis' (teacher, Castleton) comment suggests that she has similar expectations of children when starting the reception class as the ECEC practitioners above.

I really like nursery settings.because that helps prepare them for expectations, their behaviour for social skills, for being away from that primary attachment figure. From making friends umm, yeah managing emotions, I think that is a really good start and foundation (Interview, Phyllis, teacher, Castleton)

There was a consensus in opinion between these ECEC practitioners and teachers that the role of the ECEC practitioners is not to prepare them for formal learning but guide and foster children's social skills, independence and confidence. Dawn explained that when children move to the reception class teachers will teach them the associated skills, knowledge and behaviours for school learning. These views about the provision for the youngest children are underpinned by Perspective 1 'Transition to School: development within the child'.

Sophie and Dawn explained that it was by the end of the reception year children were expected to have learnt the academic skills and knowledge and behaviours

associated with school to be ready for the KS1 NC in Year 1. Their beliefs are reflected in both Castleton teachers' descriptions of their teaching methodologies and how the classroom environment changed during the reception year, as children moved closer to Year 1.

They still learn through their play. Umm, so I still make sure that they still have lots of time to indulge in their interest but at the same time introducing that little bit more structure to prepare them. (Interview, Phyllis, teacher, Castleton)

The environment changes throughout the year,But umm, actually I think it's quite a gradual thing, that in response to the children really, umm, obviously there is the kind of, overarching thought that next year they will be in Year 1. (Interview, Richard, teacher, Castleton)

The aim of these teachers during the reception year was to prepare children to be ready for Year 1. Neither Phyllis nor Richard explicitly referred to this being a period of adjustment, but the description of their practices did suggest there was a period of adjustment as they provided experiences that were similar to those in the ECEC setting. As the children matured Richard and Phyllis then changed the environment to prepare them to be ready for learning in Year 1.

5.3 The Reception Year – A Period of Adjustment or Preparation for Year 1

The division in roles between ECEC practitioners and teachers positioned the responsibility for preparing the children to be ready for the formal learning in Year 1 with the reception teachers. Across all the groups there were references to the reception class as a period when children would become familiar with the school culture and becoming a pupil, as well as being prepared for Year 1.

.....well, reception is another easy way of progressing them into school really. (Focus group, Lucy, parent, Townmouth)

I think that the reception year, at least there's some play involved and it's a little bit informal. I think it's that bridge between nursery and Year 1. I think it's more about getting used to school life, getting used to the routine and just building the relationships around the school. Umm, and just getting used to school life I suppose. (Focus group, Lily, practitioner, Castleton)

I have explained to parents that [the] reception is sometimes seen as a transitional year. (Interview, Richard, teacher, Castleton)

Parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers discussed how during the reception year children learnt about and became familiar with the expectations of school. Lily described the year as a bridge between the play-based pedagogy in the ECEC setting and the formal learning in Year 1. Continuing with Lily's analogy of a bridge, a bridge affords the opportunity of a back and forth movement between the different teaching methodologies of ECEC ethos and school heritage. This back and forth movement is reflected in Phyllis' earlier comment when she explains 'They still learn through their play' and 'at the same time introducing that little bit more structure to prepare them'. In the physical space of the reception class the back and forth movement between familiar and unfamiliar teaching methodologies is aimed at supporting the children's adjustment to the school culture and academic learning of school. Richard's explanation to parents that the reception year is a 'transitional year', suggests this space is also a temporal space in preparation for what is to come. Over the course of the year Phyllis and Richard had gradually introduced the children to the expectations of school, which is likely to support their adjustment to school as well as preparing the children for Year 1. Throughout the reception year when the teachers planned for children's learning they moved back and forth between the expectations of the EYFS (DfE, 2012) and KS1 NC. Returning to the perspectives of a transition Perspective 1: 'The Transition to School: development within the child' generally underpin the experiences of the EYFS (DfE, 2012) and

Perspective 2: 'The Environmental Transition to School' (as discussed in Section 2.2) underpin the experiences of the KS1 NC.

5.4 Parents Preparing and Supporting Their Children for School

In the private world of the home parents also prepared and supported their children to be ready for the move to the reception class. Castleton parents described how they prepared their children when answering the interview question 'How do/did you support them during these changes [to school]?'

Parents draw upon their funds of knowledge (Moll et al, 1992) when supporting their children to be ready for the move to the reception class.

Umm, after she has been to the toilet, umm, I have tried and pushed and pushed her to wipe herself but she managed to do it for herself last night. Yeah, normally she shouts me but when she starts going to school the teachers just won't be able to do it..... And I mean she does like workbooks with numbers in and alphabet....Yeah she has got like dot to dot, you know, she can do her letters and all that and she can write her letters really well. (Interview, Samantha, parent, Castleton)

Samantha encouraged her daughter to go to the toilet independently, by changing the practices in the home, as the school start date drew closer. This change was motivated by her awareness of the cultural expectation that when children go to school they are mature enough to go to the toilet independently. The workbooks that Samantha provided created an opportunity for her daughter to explore skills and knowledge associated with school, such as numbers, writing and the alphabet.

Other parents described how they supported these skills and knowledge when discussing everyday activities. Janet talked to her children about the forthcoming event and counted the days to when school started.

I think just talking them through it, doing activities on a calendar, building up to it...So you have count down and things like that.....buying things that they need so that they can see it every day and things like that (Interview, Janet, parent, Castleton)

In the home there were cultural rituals such as counting down the days which prepared her children for the move. Janet also introduced the equipment that is required by the school such as school uniform, book-bags and PE kit. Once bought, these were accessible to the children. Throughout she explained that she talked to her children. Lynne explained that Alison played with her older brother's school jumpers.

She has got two jumpers, that were Harry's, but umm, she has got them in her bedroom, she sleeps with them on her bed, umm but yeah quite often I find her walking around with them on, you know saying 'I am going to school'(Interview, Lynne, parent, Castleton)

During her play at home Alison was able to develop the self-care skill of dressing and undressing, whilst also becoming used to the idea that she was going to school, like her older brother.

Louise was aware that children who had older siblings at school had learnt some of the cultural expectations of being a school pupil before starting school:

And if you've got one that's older you tend to find the younger one learns quicker because what you were doing with the older one the younger one is watching and learning. (Interview, Louise, parent, Castleton)

The siblings of my children, they come in [to the classroom] and they sit down and they start playing and they socialise really well and I say 'they are ready for school'.(Focus group, Sarah, teacher, Townmouth)

These families' practices had already reorganised the home routines when the older child started school. When the younger children participated in these daily rituals they became familiar with the expectations of school and being a school pupil. The

child that Sarah discussed has become familiar with the route to school and the beginning of the school day by being involved in the daily routine of taking her elder sibling to school.

Louise also explained how much more prepared she felt supporting her second child.

I wasn't kind of aware of the academic skills, of like what was the expected thing when my [first] son went to school. I think I will be more prepared when my second one goes to school I will have the one on one time with my youngest son to teach him things before. (Focus group, parent, Louise, Castleton)

Louise's comment suggests that she was not aware of the academic skills required for school when she prepared her eldest child but she now she explains she is more aware of strategies to prepare her younger child for what is to come.

Rosie explained that when she prepared her eldest child, Harry, to start school she planned opportunities for him to become familiar with the walk to school, as he was going to attend a school that was in the opposite direction to the ECEC setting

In the summer holidays we sort of practised the walk so Harry knows the routes and the faces that were going to be there. (Interview, Rosie, parent, Castleton)

Rosie was aware that practising the walk to school would support Harry to become familiar with the route and be aware that the route to school was different to that of the ECEC setting. The types of activities parents planned for their children depended upon their families' circumstances, such as if they were preparing their eldest child or second child for school.

Parents in this case study spent much time preparing and supporting their children during the transition to school. In the current political context the focus on children's school readiness and transition to school can overlook that this is only one transition that parents support children through.

.....it's just about changes and teaching children that life is constantly changing, yeah, and no matter what, you keep on going, but change will always happen no matter what in life. (Focus group, parent, Anna, Townmouth)

Is it getting them ready for school? Or is it just getting them ready for life? (Focus group, parent, Lynne, Castleton)

Both parents saw this transition as part of their role for supporting their children for life and the how to cope with the changes that would experience during their life.

5.5 Summary

The findings presented above have laid out the comments made by parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, during their interviews and the focus groups. One of the issues they discussed was their role in preparing children to be ready for school. The complexity at this stage of the children's educational trajectory is the terms school ready and school readiness, can be associated with both the transition from the ECEC setting to the reception class and the transition when children move from environments guided by the EYFS to one that is guided by the KS1 NC. There is further complexity as these transitions have different expectations of the children and those preparing them. Findings suggest parents and ECEC practitioners saw themselves as preparing children for an institutional transition, as children move from the ECEC setting to the reception class and reception teachers preparing children for the move between different curricula and teaching methodologies. Parents and ECEC practitioners are preparing children by fostering children's dispositions and attitudes to change as well as their personal and social skills and teachers prepare children by teaching them the skills, knowledge and behaviours associated with school. In the following chapters the relationships and interactions between these adults during the transition are presented. The four phases of the

transition that are presented are: Phase 1: during the autumn and spring terms nearly a year prior to the child starting the reception class; Phase 2: the term before starting the reception class; Phase 3: the term after starting the reception class and finally Phase 4: the spring and summer terms of the reception class before starting Year 1.

Chapter 6 – Relationships as Preparations Begin

6 Introduction

This chapter is the first of four chapters that present the findings of the data analysis. During the data analysis the qualities of the relationships between adults were explored, as they prepared and supported children, during both the institutional and the curriculum transitions. In Chapter 4 Section 4.9 I have described how the data had been chronologically ordered on the conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School'. I then referred to policy and academic literature to gain further insight and make sense of the interactions between the groups. The iterative process of moving between data and literature identified patterns in the interactions between groups. Four types of relationships were then identified: a distant relationship; a dominant relationship; a familiar relationship; and a utopian relationship. Each relationship had distinct qualities. The qualities of a distant relationship are that there is limited or no interactions between members of the groups, but each group does have inter-setting knowledge about the other. The inter-setting knowledge is generally based on observations, past experiences or second-hand information from another source. The inter-setting knowledge influences the perceptions of each other and each other's role. The qualities of a dominant relationship are that information generally flows from the group receiving the children to those that are preparing the children. Information is primarily about children's academic learning and behaviours. Each group also has inter-setting knowledge about the other, which influences the perceptions of each other. The qualities of a familiar relationship are that there is two-way communication, with acknowledgment of each other's experiences with the children and their funds of knowledge. The qualities of this relationship can occur as a transient phenomenon

or last for more than one phase of the transition, as there are also qualities of a utopian relationship, such as empathy and respect for each other's experiences. Whilst understandings are not yet embedded across groups these are in the process of being co-constructed. Finally the qualities of a utopian relationship are that there is two-way communication. Groups are empathetic to each other, and there is recognition of, and respect for, each other's experiences with children and their funds of knowledge. The communication and interactions focus on cognitive, affective and attitudinal domains of children's learning. Meanings have been co-constructed and continue to be constructed throughout the transition.

To demonstrate the iterative nature of the data analysis I will describe how I made sense of Janet's (Castleton parent governor) comment in Chapter 7, Section 7.1.3. Analysis of the comment suggests that there was evidence of the qualities of a familiar relationship between teachers and parents:

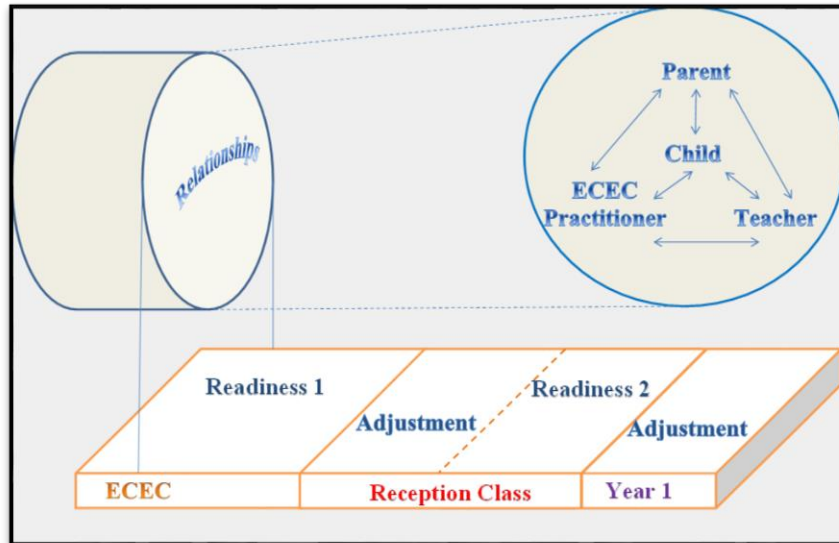
We did groups to bring the parents to meet the teacher and out of twenty seven families only eight turned up. So the teacher went out to the home visits ... in July and then by September the ice has already been broken.... to try and get the other parents in [to attend meetings]. (Focus group, Janet, parent Castleton)

The motivation for teachers to change their practices drew upon their past experiences of working with parents. Jane's comment suggests teachers had listened to the parents' action of not attending meetings, changing practices by introducing home visits. This suggests two-way communication. The teachers could also be motivated to develop strategies to establish relationships as this is an expectation of policy and also because of their awareness of the benefits of parents and teachers working in partnership. The teachers' beliefs are supported by the academic literature. The home visits provided an opportunity for teachers to find out

about parents' and their children's funds of knowledge and experiences beyond school. Gonzalez et al (2005) write that teachers can use this information to make links between the children's experiences beyond and in school. I have labelled this relationship as a familiar relationship as it was not apparent whether the qualities of this relationship would continue after this phase of the transition. Whilst the presentation of these relationships could be interpreted as four distinct types, in this study the qualities of the relationships are presented on a continuum along which groups can move back and forth.

Returning to the layout of the following chapters at the beginning of each chapter 'The Relational Transition to School' model locates the phase of the transition to be discussed. Findings from the Castleton case are presented first and then those of the Townmouth case. Following there is a comparison of the cases highlights key issues associated with the phase of transition being discussed. The discussion begins with a table which presents the qualities of the relationship between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers during the phase.

In this chapter the qualities of the relationships between participants during Phase 1 of the transition are presented. Phase 1 is between the autumn and spring term prior to the children's move to the reception class, Figure 10 represents Phase 1 of the transition.



6 Figure 10: Phase 1 of The Transition to School

6.1 The Castleton Case

6.1.1 Parents and ECEC Practitioners

The relationships between parents and ECEC practitioners have the qualities of a utopian relationship. Nearly a year before the children moved to the reception class parents and ECEC practitioners started planning for the move.

In the October the letters go out to the parents, so we start approaching them and we just say that we can help you with that, we can help you apply online or when they fill out the forms we take them to Castleton for them. Because three years ago there was a big issue where a lot of them didn't do it. They think they can just leave it till the last minute and get their children in. (Interview, Sophie, practitioner, Castleton)

Sophie was referring to the information provided by the LA to parents, which was discussed in Section 1.6. This information provided parents with information about the application processes and a choices that they have, when applying for their children's school place. In previous years parents had not met the LA deadlines, which had caused problems when the authority allocated school places. Sophie and her colleagues had been prompted by this information and used it by offering

parents support when making the application. Samantha explained how the ECEC practitioners supported her when planning for her daughter's transition.

I suppose nursery telling me that I have got choices. I didn't realiseyou had three choices. (Interview, Samantha, parent, Castleton)

The content of the information that ECEC practitioners shared with Samantha was useful and applicable to her at that time. Samantha did choose to send her daughter to another school in the area. The information that the ECEC practitioners shared with Samantha made her aware that she was entitled to choose three schools, when applying for her daughter's school place. The systems the ECEC practitioners implemented were more likely to support parents to secure a place for their child in their preferred school.

Lily described the interactions between ECEC practitioners and parents when commenting on the slide (Appendix 3, page 200, slide 37), which had a reference to a parent's mental health.

I think at nursery, possibly we get more of a window to speak to these parents on a bit more of an informal level and I know for this parent there has been a lot more of coming in for a coffee and it's really supported her. (Focus group, Lily, practitioner, Castleton)

The informal and flexible relational environment of the ECEC setting provided opportunities for ECEC practitioners to be responsive to parents, to speak to them and gain insights into the families' experiences. These practices are in keeping with the ECEC ethos and SSLPs.

6.1.2 ECEC Practitioners and Teachers

The relationships between teachers and ECEC practitioners have the qualities of a distant relationship. Lily made a judgement of the school practices based upon her observations and comparison of her practices of working with parents.

I don't think they have that chance at school. So I don't think they probably know this parent as well as they need to. To understand what is going on in the background. (Focus group, Lily, practitioner, Castleton)

Lily explained that the school environment and systems are not conducive for teachers to gain insights into the children and families' contexts. The ECEC practitioners' perceptions of the teachers and their practices were based upon their observations.

Lily was aware there were possibilities of a different relationship between the ECEC practitioners and the teachers and that different relationships would provide opportunities for the children to visit the school to prepare for the move, which would support the children's adjustment to school.

I think we are trying to improve mainly, with our links with the school. I think it would be lovely if they could meet up more with the school and have a few more visits over there to get used to the school. (Interview, Lily, practitioner, Castleton)

Visits between the ECEC setting and the school, for children, ECEC practitioners and teachers, did not happen at the time of the research, but an ECEC practitioner and a parent explained that in the past these had happened.

A few years back, when we had the gate open, it would be a natural – they would know the school very well because they would have had possibly two terms of being able to go over there, so they would have known the school, classroom, teacher, some of the staff, and the staff would come over here. (Interview, Sophie, practitioner, Castleton)

Janet the parent governor explained the teachers' rationale for stopping these visits.

Not for two years now this is the second year we haven't done it [arranged visits] Umm, no we haven't because of other issues with the school because of OfSTED and things like that and this year group. This year they [the reception children] can't cope with any more children going in that is why they had to stop it this year. (Focus group, Janet, parent, Castleton)

The OfSTED judgement had created pressures for the teachers to improve their practices. This priority had narrowed the teachers' focus to raising children's academic attainment at school. Focusing on children's attainment at school had appeared to limit the opportunities for teachers to maintain the relationships with the ECEC practitioners and to acknowledge children's experiences at the ECEC setting. This had led to a shorter period of preparations for the transition. Janet explained the visits had not happened for a second year, as teachers believed the current reception class children would not be able to manage a change in routine. This could be attributed to the nature of the group of children or because the children were viewed as not ready for Year 1.

6.1.3 Teachers and Parents

Parents and teachers made no reference to any interactions between them at this phase of the transition. This could suggest that the relationships between teachers and parents have qualities of a distant relationship. However, data for this phase is limited as participants were not explicitly asked about their relationships between each other, during this phase of the transition to school.

6.2 The Townmouth Case

6.2.1 Parents and ECEC Practitioners

The relationships between the ECEC practitioners and parents had many of the qualities of a utopian relationship. Mary and Dawn described the context in which these relationships were established.

You have time to develop relationships, especially if you have had the child since a baby, a good four years (Focus group, Mary, practitioner, Townmouth)

When we had the whole family through nursery, you think 'oh we had all three of theirs' and it's nice. You do build a proper relationship with some of the families.....you wouldn't be able to build a relationship if everything was so completely formal, you need to be approachable. (Focus group, Dawn, practitioner, Townmouth)

Both Mary and Dawn explained the 'proper' relationships with families had been established and developed over a long period of time, as children could attend the ECEC setting from a very young age and several children from one family could attend the ECEC setting. Dawn's comment 'oh we had all three of theirs' and Mary's comments in the previous chapter, Section 5.1, about the changes in expectations of school readiness throughout her career, suggest that they have both worked in local ECEC settings for many years. Time alone was not enough to establish these relationships, but also the relational context was important, as were the dispositions of the ECEC practitioners. Dawn explained that the context should be 'relaxed' and the ECEC practitioners 'approachable'. As Dawn and Mary were consistent and familiar members of the ECEC setting this could also contribute to them being viewed as approachable by parents and families.

Dawn explained that ECEC practitioners were available on a daily basis for parents to talk to them.

The parents will come and say to you, 'Oh you know, you might need to keep an eye on them when they go to the loo'. Or if they have got dungarees on to give them that extra [support]. We are there all the time. Parents aren't necessarily going to be able to have those kind of conversations with the teacher outside in the playground (Focus group, Dawn, practitioner, Townmouth)

Dawn compares and notes the differences in the school and ECEC settings' routine and environment and attributes these to the different interactions between parents and teachers and parents and ECEC practitioners. Whilst the routines and environment will contribute to shaping the types of interactions between groups the professional ethos of the ECEC practitioners will also guide their practices of working with parents. Working in partnership with parents is central to the practices underpinned by the ECEC ethos, as is fostering children's holistic development. This would include supporting children's personal care, such as helping them to go to the toilet when wearing dungarees. The everyday information that is shared between parents and ECEC practitioners is meaningful, relevant and useful to both groups, as they support children to develop the necessary skills for daily life as well as school.

Mary explained that working with parents to support their children's learning also included supporting parents at times.

We [do not] just keep parents up to date with their child's learning?
No we are generally there for anything. It's care and support with anything they want, some are obviously going to need more than others (Focus group, Mary, practitioner, Townmouth)

David provided an example of how the ECEC practitioners had supported his family as well as caring for and supporting his son's learning.

They've been absolutely fabulous here, you know, when I've needed to go to the hospital or whatever, they've changed my times for Logan, they've been absolutely fabulous.....they want to go the extra mile (Focus group, David, parent, Townmouth)

David's account that the ECEC practitioners had provided different sessions for Logan whilst he attended a hospital appointment reflects Mary's comments. Mary viewed each family's context as unique and the information and knowledge she had about families was useful to her as she shaped the provision in response to their requirements. The ECEC practitioners acknowledged the wider context of the child's life experiences when planning for them.

David's comments suggest he valued the support of ECEC practitioners during his illness. His comment, 'they want to go the extra mile', suggests that the ECEC practitioners had helped him and his family more than he expected. Being regarded by parents as a source of support and advice can pose challenges for these ECEC practitioners. Elizabeth recounted that at times the relationships she had established made her uncomfortable.

I can get called in the playground by parents, and I am not even working and [there are issues of] confidentiality if you want a chat. I am quite happy to, [but] please come and see me at nursery, but I can't in the playground discuss,...I would love to help you I'm trying to keep an eye on my own children running in the playground.
(Focus group, Elizabeth, practitioner, Townmouth)

Elizabeth lives and works in the same community and her children attend the same school as children who had attended or whose younger siblings were attending the ECEC setting. Parents approached her in the playground and talked to her about work related issues when she was in the role of a mother collecting her children from school. If parents view ECEC practitioners as approachable and wanting 'to go the extra mile', this can explain why parents view Elizabeth as a source of information and easy to approach. This is uncomfortable for her when juggling the roles of being a mother and ECEC practitioner.

Despite being viewed as a good source of information, and with communication flowing between ECEC practitioners and parents, Elizabeth and Dawn perceive parents as not respecting them, particularly when compared to a teacher.

If a person has got the title 'teacher' parents listen harder. We can say exactly the same thing, but because we are not recognised as a teacher, qualified teacher.....Its' the whole respect thing as well isn't it? (Focus group, Elizabeth, practitioner, Townmouth)

Yeah there is a lot more respect. We had that with umm, learning through play wasn't it? Once it came from the schools as an invite, it suddenly took on much greater importance. (Focus group, Dawn, practitioner, Townmouth)

Elizabeth and Dawn have interpreted from their observations of parents' interactions with teachers and themselves that their work is considered of less value. From the parents' perspective there may be other reasons why they attend the sessions at school but not the ECEC setting. These could include that the relationships between parents and ECEC practitioners provide enough opportunities for parents to find out about their children and what happens at the ECEC setting.

6.2.2 ECEC Practitioners and Teachers

The relationships between the ECEC practitioners and teachers had many of the qualities of a dominant relationship, as teachers generally communicated their expectations of children behaviour to the ECEC practitioners.

David explained that school visits had been planned for the ECEC children:

..... whilst it's done safely and in an organised manner, they are in and out of school. And it doesn't happen a few weeks before they start school, they started visiting [school] a long time in advance (Focus group, David, parent, Townmouth)

In my research journal I documented a conversation I had had with Heidi on 16th January 2014, which explained why the children and ECEC practitioners visited the school.

Heidi said children attended assemblies, sports day, the Christmas pantomime, and other school activities.

The location of the school and ECEC setting provided opportunities for the children and ECEC practitioners to visit the school and take part in school rituals. These visits are underpinned by Perspective 2 'The Environmental Transition to School'. By attending school rituals children are introduced to and become familiar with the expectations of school. School visits for the ECEC children and practitioners only happened for certain occasions and no participant mentioned that the school children and teachers made visits to the ECEC setting.

Dawn had become aware, through her interactions with teachers, that different reception teachers had different expectations of the children when they started school.

Yeah, it depends what type of teacher because we have had [various] teachers over here and one person's view of teaching early years is very, very different to somebody else's..... We really had that last year, ...with different teaching staff in reception, whereas one that is much more open and much more knowledgeable. Whereas, before they had umm, an old fashioned type teacher who wanted them to come and sit down and listen. (Focus group, Dawn, practitioner, Townmouth)

During Phase 1 of the transition there had been a different reception teacher in the reception class. Dawn explained this teacher was 'old fashioned', as she expected children to sit and listen when they arrived at school. This teacher's expectations resulted in a one-way communication from her to the ECEC practitioners and the focus of the communication was children's school behaviour.

6.2.3 Teachers and Parents

Parents made no explicit references to the interactions between them during this phase of the transition. David, however, in Section 6.2.2, did comment on the observations he had made of the relationships between the ECEC practitioners and teachers. These observations and the judgements he made about these relationships would contribute to his future relationships with the school and teachers. This could suggest that the relationships between the previous teachers and these parents have qualities of a distant relationship, but caution is needed when making judgements as data is limited. Participants were asked about their experiences of supporting children during a transition but not explicitly asked about their relationships between each other when preparing children for the transition to school.

6.3 Comparison of Cases

Table 9 summarises the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers in both cases, during the autumn and spring term prior to the move from the ECEC setting to the reception class

| | Parent – ECEC practitioner | Teacher- ECEC practitioner | Teacher – Parent |
|-----------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Castleton | Utopian relationship | Distant relationship | Distant Relationship |
| Townmouth | Utopian relationship | Dominant relationship | Distant Relationship |

6.3 Table 9: Relationships Between Those Preparing Children During Phase 1 of The Transition

In both cases the relationship between parents and ECEC practitioners had qualities of a utopian relationship. The qualities of the relationship between ECEC practitioners and teachers were either a distant relationship or a dominant relationship. In both cases the qualities of the relationship between parents and teachers appeared to be of a distant relationship. Neither parents nor teachers made references to establishing relationships or interacting with each other when planning for the transition to school, but as explained previously caution is needed when making judgements as data is limited.

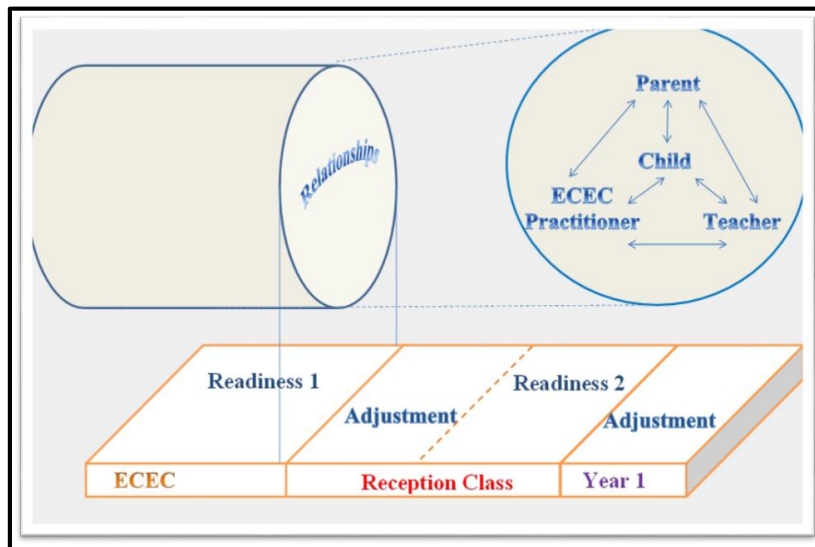
In both cases ECEC practitioners drew upon the ECEC ethos and practices of SSCC, when establishing relationships with parents. Another similarity between the cases was that most of the ECEC practitioners had lived and worked in the local community for many years. ECEC practitioners were likely to have similar beliefs, parenting styles, expectations of and aspirations for children as the parents that also live in the neighbourhood (Yarrow, 2015). These funds of knowledge were meaningful and useful to both groups, as they supported children to be ready for school and life. There was an apparent ease when parents and ECEC practitioners shared information with each other, which was often during informal interactions. The Townmouth ECEC practitioners acknowledged that there was effective communication and 'proper relationships' between them and parents but they tended to view parents as not respecting them or listening to them as they did the teachers. The informality of the interactions may contribute to ECEC practitioners' views that parents did not respect them as they did teachers. These perceptions could be reinforced by the view that working with the youngest children is a low status occupation and ECEC is at the bottom of the schooling hierarchy, as discussed in Section 3.5.3.

During this phase of the transition the quality of relationship between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers influenced if and how the groups started preparations for the children's move. In both cases where there was a distant relationship between groups participants made no reference to working together to prepare for the children's move to school. Groups that had either a dominant relationship or a utopian relationship did start preparations during this phase, but the qualities of interactions were different. In Townmouth, ECEC practitioners and teachers who had qualities of a dominant relationship explained preparations included visits to the school. These preparations were underpinned by Perspective 2 'The Environmental Transition to School', teachers and ECEC practitioners provided these experiences to familiarise the children with the school environment. In Castleton where there were qualities of a utopian relationship between parents and ECEC practitioners the relationships were underpinned by Perspective 3 'The Relational Transition to school'. ECEC practitioners developed systems based on their knowledge of the parents to support them complete and submit the school admissions forms.

Chapter 7 – Preparations During the Summer Term Before Children Start School

7 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers as they prepare children during Phase 2 of the transition. Phase 2 is during the summer term prior to the children’s move from the ECEC setting to the reception class. In both cases there were changes in the relationships as the teachers become involved in the preparations. Figure 11 represents the relationships between those preparing children during this phase.



7 Figure 11: Phase 2 of The Transition to School

7.1 The Castleton Case

7.1.1 Parents and ECEC Practitioners

Qualities of a utopian relationship remained between parents and ECEC practitioners during this phase of the transition but children's preparation for school intensified. Sophie explained:

Normally each year we do get quite a lot of questions from parents, a lot of them – especially new parents, around uniforms. (Interview, Sophie, practitioner, Castleton)

The content of the discussion focused on the everyday knowledge about starting school; the interactions were informal and instigated by the parents. In response to the parents' questions, the ECEC practitioners had planned and held a transition group during this term.

It was just a very informal laid back group..... just an opportunity for the parents really just to come and share their fears. Umm, cos obviously if parents have got fears, it is going to rub off onto the children as well. It is quite an anxious time and it was an opportunity for the teachers to be invited down [to the SSCC], in a relaxed atmosphere, one that the parents know well and for them to ask any questions really. I'm doing it [the transition group] with Jackie this year. She's the family support worker over at the school. It is a little bit different but it will be interesting, I am looking forward to it. (Focus group, Clare, practitioner Castleton)

Clare described the transition group that had happened the previous year when she led the group with the SSCC teacher. The interactions between the ECEC practitioner, SSCC teacher and parents had been informal, parents initiated the discussions and the information was relevant to the parents. Clare empathises with the parents by acknowledging their anxieties about their children starting school, and that these anxieties could affect how the children view the transition and school. The venue for the group was a room in the SSCC, which was familiar to the parents. This year the group was to be held in the school and the person leading this group

with Clare was the school Family Support Advisor (FSA), Jackie. Clare's comment, 'it is a little bit different', suggests there may also be different approaches when implementing the group compared with the previous year. These differences could then influence the relationships and interactions between participants during the transition group.

7.1.2 ECEC Practitioners and Teachers

The qualities of the relationship between ECEC practitioners and teachers shifted from those of a distant relationship to those of a dominant relationship. Flo explained that there was an expectation by LA advisors and teachers that the ECEC setting should ensure that children's learning and development were at the expected stage for their age, when they entered school. The assessments of children are recorded on the summary discussed in Section 1.9.

There is a pressure from above that they [the children] are all age-appropriate.....I feel that this is being done to us in nurseries. We are being expected to do this.....You're always balancing, what we know is important; the wellbeing; the dispositions, with the things we are [expected to do] ... with these new [language] groups....., when they come off [in groups] they will be with children the same age. (Focus group, Flo, practitioner, Castleton)

Flo describes how the ECEC practitioners were expected by LA advisors to plan and introduce into the daily routine another group time, which focused on children's language development and behaviour. The children were grouped by age and adults led the activity. These practices are underpinned by the teaching methodologies of the school system. It is likely that LA advisors and teachers advocated these practices as they believed these activities would support children to be age-appropriate in their language development when they start school. The changes were uncomfortable for Flo, as the teaching methodologies she was

expected to implement did not fit with her principles and beliefs of learning. Flo's description of feeling 'being done to' suggests that communication flows from above down to her and the ECEC practitioners, with little opportunity for discussion.

Flo and Sophie tried to make sense of why these practices had been imposed on the team of ECEC practitioners.

I feel at the moment we are misunderstood in lots of ways so maybe we haven't shared particularly well with others. So my learning at the moment is about communication. How we perhaps present ourselves in a restricted way. Umm, that we know what we're doing and we have an idea. But ...maybe were not able to articulate it well enough yet. Because I think it takes time to articulate, that's an ongoing thing and maybe that's a big realisation for me. (Focus group, Flo, practitioner, Castleton)

Yeah, yeah, having things written down on paper not just saying we can do these things. (Focus group, Sophie, practitioner, Castleton)

Do you think we need that evidence because we haven't been able to say it clearly enough? (Focus group, Flo, practitioner, Castleton)

I think even if we had said it,I still think they like to see it, like written black and white. (Focus group, Sophie, practitioner, Castleton)

In this context there were qualities of a dominant relationship between ECEC practitioners and teachers. The relationship between the ECEC setting and school is based on an expectation that ECEC practitioners will prepare children for school by using the teaching methodologies of school. There were few opportunities for ECEC practitioners and teachers to engage in two-way communication and co-construct meaning of children, learning, their role in the process or the purpose of the ECEC setting. Flo explained another challenge: it takes time for ECEC practitioners to reflect and articulate their tacit theories to those beyond the setting. Flo and Sophie had made sense of this situation as they thought they were not

making themselves understood to those beyond the ECEC setting or using the preferred written mode of communication.

Sophie explained above that teachers prefer written modes of communication. The ECEC practitioners did communicate in the written form, as they completed the summaries of the children's learning at the end of the summer term and gave these to the teachers. As ECEC practitioners did provide written information about children's learning and development this would suggest it was the content of the written information with which the teachers took issue. The independent report, stated that there were:

.....differences between the school's and the setting's judgements on children's attainment, with the school's assessment being far less favourable than that of the setting (Ellis, 2013:5)

There were discrepancies between the ECEC practitioners' and teachers' assessments of the children's learning and development. The written assessments provided by the ECEC practitioners only record which stage of development the children are at in the areas of learning and development cited in the EYFS (DfE, 2012). The assessments do not provide the opportunity for ECEC practitioners to share information about the context in which these assessments were made or discuss their views and beliefs about children and learning.

7.1.3 Parents and Teachers

The qualities of the relationships between parents and teachers also changed from a distant relationship to a familiar relationship during this term, as teachers became involved in planning the children's move to school. This year the teachers had introduced home visits before the summer holidays. From the parents' accounts these appeared to be the first official contact the teachers had with parents whose

children were starting school in September. Janet, the parent governor, explained why these had been introduced earlier.

We did groups to bring the parents to meet the teacher and out of twenty seven families only eight turned up. So the teacher went out to the home visits ... in July and then by September the ice has already been broken.... to try and get the other parents in [to attend meetings]. (Focus group, Janet, parent Castleton)

In this context parents had not attended the planned session to meet the teacher at school. As parents had not attended meetings, the teachers used this information and changed their practices when establishing relationships with parents.

I definitely think it was a lot better the way they did it. They [teachers] ..., asking them what they enjoyed doing, what they enjoyed at home and they took time to go around and look at their stuff and things like that. So when they went to school they were able to sort of do activities they knew the children liked. (Interview, Lynne, parent, Castleton)

Janet reported that teachers meeting parents sooner would encourage them to attend school meetings, as they had already met the teacher. Lynne's expectation of these visits was different. Instead, she explained that the teacher found out about her daughter's experiences beyond school and that this information was used to make links between the home and school. Lynne also described the Wednesday transition group that Clare discussed earlier.

I can't fault this school. They are doing so much to prepare the children. We have got four weeks of Wednesdays going in with the children. And then they gradually introduce the teacher. (Focus group, Lynne, parent, Castleton)

Lynne explained that the focus of the transition group and home visits was to prepare children for the transition. During these activities parents were establishing relationships with school personnel. The person responsible for

establishing these initial relationships was Jackie the FSA. Not only did Jackie meet the parents during the transition group 'Jackie went on the home visits with the reception teacher' (research journal, 8th July 2013). In this school it was Jackie's role to establish relationships with parents and support and advise them with a range of issues including:

- Building a partnership with school
- Behaviour (in and out of school)
- Parenting Concerns
- Family Issues
- Emotions and Relationships
- Healthy Eating
- Attendance at School
- Housing
- Budgeting
- Feeling Isolated
- Finding information for parents and carers who want to go back to work or into their own education or career

I can also be available just to listen and support if you feel you need someone to talk to in confidence (school website, 2013)

During the parents' first interactions with school personnel, the focus was not upon children's academic learning, which can explain why Jackie had led the group with Clare.

Parents of children who had a special need did meet the head teacher to plan the child's transition to school. Alison's rare medical condition prompted a SEP meeting, as discussed in Section 1.9. Lynne recounted her experience.

Because of Alison's medical problems I've had quite a few meetings already with the teachers. So I can put my worries across with how things are going to be for her.....We had a big meeting with lots of people. Alison has to keep to a 96.8% or 97.8% I can't remember attendance thing. Well she gets ill quite often she spends a lot of time at hospital and that's panicked me now. How am I going to, she [head-teacher] said; 'well make sure hospital appointments are outside of school time'. That isn't always possible, so now I'm panicking. (Focus group, Lynne, parent, Castleton)

The aim of the SEP meeting is to provide an opportunity for all those supporting the child with an additional need to plan the transition together. There were opportunities for Lynne to share her concerns with teachers and for teachers to gain an insight into Alison's health issues and life beyond school. The planning of Alison's transition was constrained by national systems which enforce children's school attendance, such as School Attendance Order; Parenting Orders; penalties; and systems to prosecute parents (Gov, 2015), as discussed in Section 1.2. The head-teacher's suggestion that Alison's medical appointments should happen after school could have been influenced by the expectations of the government attendance policy. Lynne was aware this was not always possible, which consequently made her anxious.

Janet mentioned above that not many parents turned up to school meetings. Beth explained in her interview why she had not attended talks by the teachers.

...parents that have children at home, because all the parent talks and stuff that tell you how the school is run I can't go to because I have got Neil at home and they won't they won't provide a crèche.
(Focus group, Beth, parent, Castleton):

Whilst teachers provided occasions to share information with parents about their child starting school they did not always take into account parents' other commitments. Such oversights can limit the opportunities for parents to engage with the teachers to share their views and to find out about the transition process from the teacher's perspective.

7.2 The Townmouth Case

The change in government policies had led to Heidi's position as SSCC teacher ending. She has since gained employment in the school that shared the same site as the ECEC setting. This was Heidi's first term as reception teacher.

7.2.1 Parents and ECEC Practitioners

The data suggests that qualities of a utopian relationship remained between parents and ECEC practitioners. During the focus groups no parent or ECEC practitioner discussed examples of practice which specifically prepared the children for their move. Possible explanations for this is that the data collection happened after the children's move to school, and during the focus group participants had not been asked to give examples of their practices.

Although the participants did not explicitly describe the preparations for the children's move, Anna's comment below can be interpreted as meaning that the communication between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers supported the preparation of the children for the move.

I think it's brilliant, sorry the communication is brilliant and there hasn't been a problem with nursery and school everything seems to run really smoothly. There is a lot of communication going on between the teachers and the parents and everything. (Symposium, Anna, parent, Townmouth)

It's lucky because we are on the school site though isn't it? I think that makes a huge difference if you're on the doorstep. (Symposium, Dawn, practitioner, Townmouth)

Anna explained it is not just the communication between parents and ECEC practitioners that had prepared the children, but also communication between the ECEC practitioners and teachers. Her comment, 'everything seems to run really smoothly', would suggest that she had not encountered contradictions and inconsistencies in the information being shared during the transition. Dawn

explained that the location of the school and ECEC setting enabled communication between the groups.

It is also likely that Heidi's knowledge of the ECEC setting's practices and her relationships with teachers, ECEC practitioners and parents also contribute to the consistency in expectation across both contexts and the flow of communication between the adults preparing children for the move.

7.2.2 ECEC Practitioners and Teachers

Instead of a dominant relationship between ECEC practitioners and teachers the relationships now had qualities of a familiar relationship. These changes in this relationship could be attributed to the fact that children's starting date for school was drawing closer or, as mentioned above, due to Heidi's change in roles.

In Section 6.2.2 Dawn (ECEC practitioner) explained that the qualities in relationship between the teachers and ECEC practitioners had changed since Heidi had started working in the school. Dawn described Heidi as 'much more open and much more knowledgeable'. How these ECEC practitioners viewed the teacher depended on the teacher's views and understandings of teaching and learning. These perceptions were more favourable between Heidi and the ECEC practitioners as both had similar beliefs of supporting children's learning and development and similar expectations of children.

Heidi explained that the similar beliefs and the relationships she had with the ECEC practitioners had been established and developed when working with them in the SSCC.

[as a] children's centre teacher, we've been really fortunate over the last seven years to go on training that really challenges your thinking, but you also know that other reception teachers, particularly, hardly get invited to any of it... but also practitioners came to some of it it's very different now and we have to sell that and that's what in the children's centre we've been doing for seven years. (Focus group, Heidi, teacher, Townmouth)

She described how her views of children, learning and her role in the process had changed when working and attending training with the ECEC practitioners. During the training and working together Heidi and her ECEC colleagues had challenged long held beliefs and co-constructed beliefs about the child, learning and their role in the process. Heidi explained that ECEC practices are very different from those in school. This can be attributed to the aims of SSCCs being different to those she had previously experienced at school. When Heidi became the school reception teacher and Early Years Leader these were the views and beliefs that underpinned her practices.

Since Heidi's move to school formal opportunities had been introduced for her and her past colleagues to meet.

..... you have a leadership meeting? Every Monday afternoon. So I try and come over, so that if there is anything [to discuss] we can liaise...and then we meet a liaison team....every half term. (Symposium, Heidi, teacher, Townmouth)

These weekly and half termly meetings provide a formal forum to discuss and share practices whilst maintaining relationships between the teachers and ECEC practitioners. During these meetings ECEC practitioners contribute to the teachers' planning for the children's move to school.

Have some input in which children go into which class It's nice to have that input. (Focus group, Elizabeth, practitioner, Townmouth)

The flow of communication from the ECEC practitioner to teacher and the use of this information led Elizabeth to believe her opinions were valued and useful to the

teachers. These interactions are likely to maintain the familiar relationships, as well as providing opportunities for ECEC practitioners and teachers to continue to co-construct meaning in relation to the children and their learning, as well as the transition.

7.2.3 Parents and Teachers

The relationship between the parents and teachers had qualities of a familiar relationship. It was not only Heidi's existing relationships with parents, as discussed in 7.2.1, that were likely to influence the qualities of relationships between her and the parents but also her aspiration that parents should not perceive her just as a teacher.

I suppose you want people to see you as a human being...
(Symposium, Heidi teacher, Townmouth)

Heidi's use of the term 'human being' suggests her awareness that parents can view teachers as different. To be viewed as human requires Heidi to consider how she presents and interacts with parents. Since starting her teaching role at school, she and her colleagues have reconsidered the school strategies of working with parents.

We are really trying to do things differently aren't we? Try to think outside the box, having, worked with the nursery [practitioners] for seven years and now back in the school, we are just trying to do totally different things, well not necessarily change things that work but add to them to encourage more families to be involved. (Focus group, Heidi, teacher, Townmouth)

Her desire 'to do things differently' could suggest her awareness that the school systems might limit parents' opportunities of being involved and viewing her as 'a human-being'. During her experiences as a SSCC teacher and working with the ECEC practitioners Heidi had an opportunity to become familiar with and experience working with parents underpinned by the ECEC ethos and the SSCC agenda. Heidi

drew upon these experiences when developing practices at school. It was not her intention simply to transfer ECEC practices into school but instead to build upon the best of both school and ECEC sector practices.

Heidi had introduced home visits. The parents discussed the home visits. Initially parents were uncertain about this practice.

I think the home visits were really, really good. (Focus group, Anna, parent, Townmouth)

They're [home visits] scary as well, because the teacher's been in your house... if they've been in your house, they can't be a stranger. So I think that makes [teachers] less scary (Focus group, David, parent, Townmouth)

Nobody had heard of it before. You're thinking, well why are they coming to your home? But when they come there, like you say, they just talk and, asked Luke what he enjoyed and he was getting his toys out to show them,....he loved it. (Focus group, Carrie, parent, Townmouth)

The anxiety about the home visits could also be due to this process being unfamiliar to the parents, as the ECEC practitioners had not carried out home visits. Although anxious, these parents acknowledged there were benefits from these visits as they and their children were able to meet the teacher in a familiar context and the children could tell the teachers about their interests beyond school. Parents observed how much their children enjoyed the teachers' visits. David explained that after the visit he did not view Heidi as scary or a stranger. These visits had provided an opportunity for parents to change views of Heidi and her reception teacher colleague.

7.3 Comparison of Cases

Table 10 summarises the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers in both cases, during the summer term prior to the move from the ECEC setting to the reception class.

| | Parent – ECEC practitioner | Teacher – ECEC practitioner | Teacher – Parent |
|-----------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Castleton | Utopian relationship | Dominant Relationship | Familiar Relationship |
| Townmouth | Utopian relationship | Familiar relationship | Familiar relationship |

7.3 Table 10: Relationships Between Those Preparing Children During Phase 2 of The Transition

Where there had been a utopian relationship between parents and ECEC practitioners prior to the summer term, these remained. As teachers became more involved in the preparing the children for the move to school the relationships between them and parents changed from a distant relationship to a familiar relationship. In Castleton the relationships between the ECEC practitioners and teachers changed from a distant relationship to a dominant relationship and in Townmouth these changed from a dominant to a familiar relationship.

In both cases the relationships between teachers and parents had qualities of a familiar relationship. Teachers from both contexts had carried out home visits to meet the children and their families, which familiarised them with the children's experiences beyond the school. The visits in Townmouth had changed David's perceptions of the teachers. Guided by her previous experiences of working with parents in a SSCC, Heidi was keen to develop relationships with parents in a different way. Heidi's aim would have shaped her views of working with parents and the relationships she established with them. In the Castleton case, whilst the teacher did visit the homes of the children, it was primarily the role of the FSA and not of the teachers to establish relationships with the parents and support them

during the preparations for school and with other issues not directly associated with their children's academic learning. This can explain Lynne's view that the home visit was an opportunity for teachers to meet her daughter and her comment 'they gradually introduce the teacher' during the transition group.

In Castleton the SEP meeting was a Southwood LA system aimed to foster communication between the groups preparing a child with a special educational need. On one hand, the SEP meeting was creating opportunities for teachers, parents and others to share information about their experiences of being with the child and to plan the transition; on the other hand, the school admission and attendance policies constrained the opportunities use the information shared to plan together, as these created social pressures for parents. In Section 5.1 Lynne explained that she agreed to make sure her daughter's medical support was in place before starting school. In the Townmouth context, there were no references to SEP meetings. Anna explained that there was good communication between parents and teachers. Familiar relationships between all the adults enabled communication to flow between them, which supported a 'smooth' transition, as described by Anna. Dawn attributed the two-way communication between those supporting children to the location of the ECEC setting and school. Comparison of the contexts would suggest that location is not enough. Instead, how parents and teachers view their role is likely to influence the qualities of the relationships between each other and how and what information is shared between them.

The relationships between teachers and ECEC practitioners were influenced by how they viewed each other's pedagogic practices. In Castleton, where there were qualities of a dominant relationship between the ECEC practitioners and teachers, the ECEC practitioners considered that teachers 'misunderstood' them and their

practices. These misunderstandings led to the ECEC practitioners being expected to introduce practices that were influenced by the teaching methodologies associated with school. In the Castleton case the dominant relationship between the ECEC practitioners and teachers would suggest there is an expectation on the part of the teachers that the ECEC practitioners should prepare children to be ready to learn the skills, knowledge and behaviours associated with school at the first transition. This is the institutional transition when children move from the ECEC setting to the reception class. As reported in Chapter 5, there was a consensus amongst the research participants that being ready to learn the skills, knowledge and behaviours associated with school were not the only expectations of children when starting the reception class. It was expected that children would also be supported to foster positive dispositions and attitudes to change and their personal and social skills. These contradictions and differences in expectations and beliefs could contribute to the strained relationships between ECEC practitioners and teachers. In Townmouth the teachers and the ECEC practitioners had similar views and expectations of children when they started school as Heidi and the ECEC practitioners had co-constructed these when working together. These shared views enabled the two-way communication to continue after Heidi's move to school. During the formal meetings both groups were able to continue to co-construct meanings of learning, their roles and practices.

In Castleton the dominant relationship limited the opportunities for teachers and ECEC practitioners to co-construct meaning. An explanation can be the 'readiness' discourse in education policies and the OfSTED judgements that the school was inadequate and required to improve. The OfSTED judgement would suggest that those inspecting the school viewed teachers as not ensuring children were ready

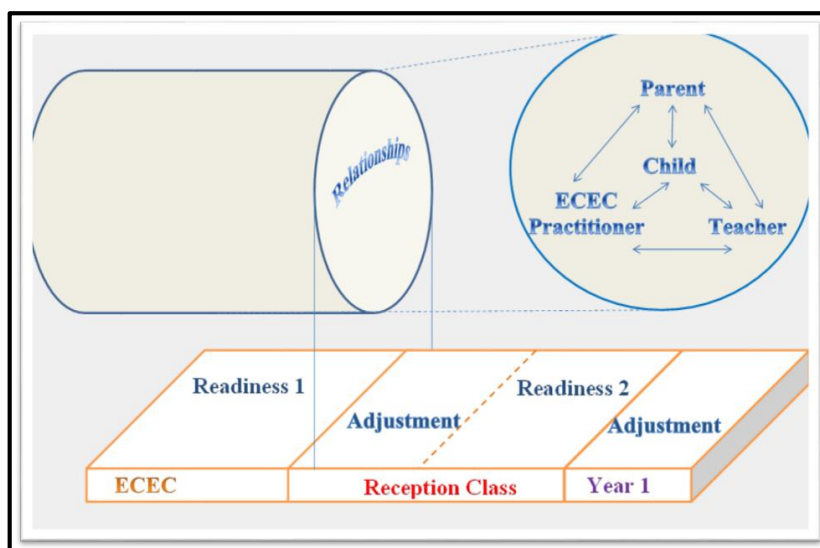
for learning at secondary school. This could create pressures on the teachers who then expected the ECEC practitioners to ensure the children were school-ready for school learning when they started school in the reception class. In such a context Flo was unable to resist the schoolification of the ECEC practices. Often it is the low status and qualifications of ECEC practitioners that contributes to this situation, but Flo has an MA Education degree (Level 7) and the NPQICL. In her position as ECEC manager she was unable to engage in the process of constructing meaning with teachers. Heidi, on the other hand had a B Ed (Level 6) with QTS and was able to influence the school parent practices of working with parents with practices underpinned by the ECEC ethos. Her position and status as reception teacher and member of the school leadership team had enabled her to introduce these practices so that the reception teachers were able to establish familiar relationships with parents and ECEC practitioners. As the school had been judged as a good school by OfSTED the leadership team could also be more confident to try different practices.

Chapter 8: Starting the School Reception Class

8 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the qualities of the relationships between the adults during Phase 3 of the transition, which is the autumn term after children have moved to the reception class. During this phase adults are supporting children to adjust to the role of pupil and to the reception class environment. As the children have now started school the relationships between parents and teachers are presented first, then ECEC practitioners and teachers and finally parents and ECEC practitioners. In both cases there were changes in the qualities of relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers.

Figure 12 represents the relationships between those supporting children during Phase 3 of the transition.



8 Figure 12: Phase 3 of The Transition to School

8.1 The Castleton Context

The findings presented in this section are of a tentative nature as teachers made no reference to their relationships or interactions with parents and ECEC practitioners during this phase of the transition. Presented below are parents' and ECEC practitioners' perceptions of their relationships and interactions with teachers.

8.1.1 Parents and Teachers

The qualities of relationship between parents and teachers changed from a familiar relationship to a dominant relationship. Parents explained that the interactions between them and the teachers primarily focused on children's academic learning and behaviours for school. Janet described a programme of workshops that she attended soon after her child had started in the reception class.

...fun learning in that you go in just one day a week with your child and we did different activities. So we did literacy and numeracy and shapes and stuff like that. (Interview, Janet, parent, Castleton)

The focus of the workshops was for parents to become familiar with activities that provided 'fun learning' experiences for children that supported their skills in literacy and numeracy. There were other opportunities for parents to be involved at school and establish relationships with the school community.

... go to like what you can with your child because they do appreciate it. Umm, like open days. Even now when my son gets certificates in assembly, they send a letter home saying that if you would like to come you can. So whenever he gets a certificate I am always in assembly watching. I have just started at school with Kieran doing a bread making course. (Interview, Louise, parent, Castleton)

Louise was motivated to attend the celebration assembly, as she was aware her son appreciated her attendance at such occasions. She made no reference to interacting with the teachers. Louise explained she had also started a bread making

course with Kieran at school. The course was led by a Family Learning practitioner (FLP) from a family learning organisation. The organisation website cites the aim of the family learning course:

The main thrust is family learning - parents and children learning together (Gymboffin, 2014)

The school leadership team had planned and provided the resources so that this activity could take place in the school. Instead of a teacher it was the FLP that led the sessions. The aim of the activity is to support parents' and children's learning together, as they made bread, which can explain why teachers do not lead this activity. The cooking activity, which is generally associated with the home, can make links between home and school experiences for the child and parent. As parents engage in this activity they are also becoming familiar with the school environment.

Soon after the children had started school the reception teacher also set homework. This was another opportunity for children to make links between school and home learning. Lynne described her daughter's homework.

I thought it was a bit much giving homework straight away. You know, four year old children having homework. Then I thought about it and actually I thought it was a really good idea. They get their homework book to do with their parentI quite enjoy sitting there on a Friday and doing making our puppets or talking about our feelings and this week it was like 'what makes you nervous?' and I had to explain to her like what nervous was, because she didn't understand the word. (Interview, Lynne, parent, Castleton)

Lynne was at first unconvinced that her daughter should be set homework but changed her mind when she became aware that the homework was to make puppets and talk about feelings. Lynne enjoyed doing these activities with her daughter. Reading books were also available for the children to take home.

Yeah they come home with a book you have got to read with them every week. A lot of parents will go in and change a book. I don't worry about that because I do read with them..... I have absolutely loads and loads of books at home. I have just gone out and brought loads more as well, because work have an amazing website and you can buy ten books for ten pound.... when I'm reading to them I will be like, I will read part of the sentence and then I will stop and they carry it on. Because they know the books that well. (Interview, Louise, parent, Castleton)

Though Louise did not use the school books she still supported her children's love of books and reading. She used strategies to support her son's knowledge of text, letting her son finish the sentence.

These parents explained that the teachers provided opportunities for them to find out about the children's learning at school, but they make no reference to sharing information with teachers about their children's learning experiences at home. These learning experiences beyond school may be unnoticed by teachers if there are limited opportunities for teachers to find out about the families' reading/literacy and mathematical habits.

Lynne described the interactions she had with the teacher and teaching assistants.

Teacher is really good yeah, they have got two Teaching Assistants in there and they are both quite easy to talk to. The teacher is always there first thing in the morning if you want a quick word with her...., and same with afterschool, she stays outside in the playground for a bit. making sure every child has a parent to go to, and then make's herself available for parents to talk to. Um, yeah she feeds back quite well. I quite like that..... teachers mentioned it a few times that they could see how tired she is (Interview, Lynne, parent, Castleton).

There were opportunities for Lynne to share information with the teacher at the beginning and end of the day. The information shared was about the child's personal wellbeing, which is knowledge about Alison that is relevant to parents and teachers. The SEP meeting that Lynne attended, which was discussed in Section

7.1.3, may be a reason why the teacher shared this information with Lynne. There were also opportunities to talk to the approachable teaching assistants, but Lynne placed more emphasis on talking to the teacher. Lynne also valued the feedback from the teacher at the end of the day, which was in the playground. Generally Lynne's comments were positive about the communication between herself and the teacher, but the use of the word 'quite' several times could suggest there is some reticence.

Janet discussed how important it was to communicate with teachers, but also the challenges parents may encounter.

Being able to talk to teachers,.....if you can talk to them you are never going to have a problem and the child is much easier and happier.....A lot of parents come in and they are like I hated school, my child is going to hate school. When actually; 'no they are not because they are not you'.I was going to say, if you are seriously worried about your child you will go and speak to the [teacher], and [if the] teacher seriously worried about that child they will come and speak to you. And even if, the teachers are not very approachable [laugh] I am not saying anything because someone works at the school. No but you do just have to pull the blinds down if you like and start. (Focus group, Janet, parent, Castleton)

Janet was aware that sharing information with the teachers would ensure children have a positive experience at school. She also acknowledges that parents' past experiences of school can prevent them from talking to the teacher and that some teachers can appear unfriendly.

Despite these obstacles Janet suggests that parents should share information with teachers when their child is having a problem, but in Section 7.1.3 it was discussed that it is the role of Jackie the FSA to support parents when they have an issue with their child or an aspect of family life. The different roles of school personal could contribute to the parents' perceptions that teachers were unfriendly.

8.1.2 ECEC Practitioners and Teachers

The dominant relationship between the ECEC practitioners and teachers returned to a distant relationship after the children's move. The only information that teachers had about the ECEC practitioners' views of the children were on the assessment summaries. Sophie explained her belief that meetings with the teachers after the children's move to the reception class would support the children's adjustment.

Also a bit about going back to the setting, you know that communication with the setting and say; 'look we have got these issues now, is there any more information, is there information currently you can give us a bit more, is there a reason?' (Focus group, Sophie, practitioner, Castleton)

Sophie's comments suggest an awareness that children require time to adjust after the move to the reception class. She is also aware that if ECEC practitioners share information about the children and their experiences beyond school with the teachers this will also support their adjustment to school. Sophie's wish to share information with teachers after children have started school can be linked with Perspective 4 'The Relational Transition to School'. Her explanation of her aspirations to have meetings with the teachers suggests that teachers do not interact with the ECEC practitioners after the move. This could mean that teachers view the transition is underpinned by Perspective 2 'The Environmental Transition to School'. From this perspective it is the responsibility of the ECEC practitioners to prepare children for school learning and as children are ready for school learning when they start the reception class they on require a short period of adjustment. Teachers and ECEC practitioners view the transition from different perspectives. These different perspectives upon the transition can explain why the teachers do

not discuss the children with the ECEC practitioners after the move and also Flo's and Sophie's frustrations at not being heard, which were discussed in Section 7.1.2.

8.1.3 Parents and ECEC Practitioners

A utopian relationship between the ECEC practitioners and some parents continued after the children's move to the reception class. Parents with younger children attending the ECEC setting maintained these relationships with ECEC practitioners. For parents without younger children attending the ECEC setting there were also opportunities for parents to maintain these relationships. Clare described one such opportunity.

I see them in the playground in the morning they might come and ask for a little bit of advice because it is all very new for them.
(Interview, Clare, practitioner, Castleton)

These interactions were often incidental and initiated by the parents. As the ECEC setting shared the same site as the school parents could visit the ECEC practitioners in the setting.

There is one child that comes back still for me to do her hair in the morning before she goes to schoolher grandparent will come to me if he has got any worries if anything has upset him so that's kind of helped him with that transition.he comes in if something happened at school that he didn't like he would kind of tell me about it all and just ask me for some advice; what he needs to do. I guess that grandparent has that relationship with me but not the teacher at the school, so he doesn't feel he can just go and rant anything to her like he does he comes in and rants to me about things; home life, school and stuff like that, yeah. (Interview, Annie, practitioner, Castleton)

Over the years that Annie had known the grandfather she had become aware of the historical context of the family and why the grandfather was the main carer for his grand-daughter. These past experiences can explain why the grandfather continued to discuss home and now school life with Annie. As the teacher did not have such insights Annie explained that the grandfather was unable to discuss such

issues with her, but he may also have been unaware that the role of the FSA was to support him and his family.

The qualities of the utopian relationship between parents and ECEC practitioners enabled parents to move back and forth between the teachers and ECEC practitioners. Both Annie and Clare viewed themselves as sources of advice for the parents as they made sense of and adjusted to the school systems.

8.2 Townmouth Case

8.2.1 Parents and Teachers

The familiar relationship between the parents and teachers continued during this phase of the transition. During the symposium discussion Anna and Sarah discussed the different contexts in which parents and teachers share information.

I think it's hard for you guys because you know, apart from parents' evenings and stuff when do you get the opportunity to take a parent out and to speak to them about an issue or something without sounding you know, panicking the parent (Symposium, Anna, parent, Townmouth)

You go out [into the playground] and they go 'oh no' because you just say 'can I have a word with your mummy, wait a minute'. (Symposium, Sarah, teacher, Townmouth)

Anna empathised with the teachers by acknowledging the constraints on them when talking to parents. She distinguished between formal and informal opportunities for teachers and parents to talk to each other and explained she believed during formal meetings parents were less likely to be 'panicked' when talking to the teacher. It was during the informal and unprompted interactions that parents were more likely to be concerned when a teacher approached them. Sarah agreed with Anna and suggested the playground was a particularly difficult space for her to interact with parents.

Although Anna outlined the challenges of communication, she also discussed the importance of parents communicating with teachers. During this discussion Heidi outlined the strategies that the reception teachers had introduced to encourage communication between parents and teachers.

I mean if you can communicate with the teachers then there's not going to be any problems (Symposium, Anna, parent, Townmouth)

We have tried to introduce four things haven't we, the home visits everything, Sarah has just got one window in her room that faces out so that people can see messages, so we tell them that we are aiming to do that day so that they can talk to their child. Umm, we have introduced many more parent letters, they are almost weekly and then we did that Sunday.....There was a focus on the community getting involved, so bring your grandparents...which a lot of the grandparents loved. You know, opening up the wider community of supporting families. (Symposium, Heidi, teacher, Townmouth)

Two of the four strategies that Heidi and Sarah had developed were written strategies. In the community where the school is situated it is likely that some parents would find reading difficult and some may not be able to read. The information also flowed from the teachers to the parents. These strategies alone would not engage all the parents and would not guarantee two-way communication or the co-construction of meanings. The home-visits and the community Sunday, however, did provide opportunities for teachers to find out about the children's and families' experiences beyond school and to co-construct meanings with parents. Heidi had encouraged parents to feedback comments about the community day and had developed strategies to inform parents how their ideas had been used in the reception class.

So like doing the Sunday afternoon open day and getting people's feedback. So we had a lot of feedback from there which we got ready to put up on the wall for parents to see. So that they know we are listening to the responses they make and then trying something..... On lots of the feedback sheets it said [the day was] informal, the children led it really, they took the parents and families where ever they wanted (Symposium, Heidi, teacher, Seaside)

Instead of the teacher leading the session there were opportunities for children to show their parents/families around their classroom. Heidi described the afternoon as informal, but this did not dissuade the parents from attending. There could also be a sense of familiarity for the parents, as the reception class relational context had similarities to those of the ECEC setting environment. Heidi was also familiar to parents, as she had established relationships with them during her role as SSCC teacher.

The new strategies of communication and the associated changes in the relational environment were being noted by the parents. Sarah recounted a conversation she had had with a parent.

A parent said that this morning actually. It's really nice to come in and everyone knowing us and everyone being friendly. They've had a child previously [at this school] and may not have had that, so it's made a lot of difference to the transition for their child. (Focus group, Sarah, teacher, Townmouth)

Sarah also explained that the changes in the relationships between teachers and parents had supported the children's adjustment to school. In the classroom Sarah appeared comfortable when interacting with the parents, but, as with the parents Anna described above, Sarah was apprehensive when approaching parents in the playground.

.... what did they expect of me? What did the parents..? What were the parents expecting and you think, 'oh, they're going to be talking about you in the playground'. It is, like, because they do all chat in the playground.... You worry about it as well. (Focus group, Sarah, teacher, Townmouth)

Sarah had recently moved from Year 1 into the reception class. She was in the process of adjusting to her role as reception class teacher and learning a different approach to supporting children's learning. These changes could explain her concern that parents may be talking about her in the playground.

The symposium afforded the opportunity for Heidi to ask Anna about the conversations in the playground.

.... in the playground, or outside in the morning, do parents talk a lot about things that are going on in the school? Do they share concerns or information out there or not really? (Symposium, Heidi, teacher, Townmouth)

Yeah they do, then they will ask when's this, if anything is going on and stuff, it's quite nice, because the parents all seem to like, it's like a big family (Symposium, Anna, parent, Townmouth)

Anna's explanation of the interactions between parents in the playground suggested that parents shared information and discussed what was happening at school together. Elizabeth, the ECEC practitioner in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.1, had commented that she thought parents were encroaching on her private time as a parent. Anna's comment could suggest the parents viewed Elizabeth as a knowledgeable parent, not just as an ECEC practitioner.

8.2.2 ECEC Practitioners and Teachers

The qualities of a familiar relationship between the ECEC practitioners and teachers remained during this phase of the transition. Formal meetings continued but there were also informal opportunities to interact during visits to each other's settings.

Both informal and formal meetings provided opportunities to co-construct meanings of the children, of learning and of their role in the process.

The formal opportunities included the LA assessment summary. During the teacher focus group Heidi and Sarah discussed the information provided by the ECEC practitioners.

Nearly all of our children came from over there [the ECEC setting which is on the school site]. Some [levels of learning and development] we've changed, but mainly they're exactly the same. (Focus group, Heidi, teacher, Townmouth)

Yeah. We were quite pleased by that because you've been working with them and they've had lots of liaisons. (Focus group, Sarah, teacher, Townmouth)

Sarah explained that these similar judgements of children's learning and development were due to Heidi's meetings with the ECEC practitioners. Whilst the meetings would support the similar understandings it is also likely the ECEC practitioners' judgements of children's learning were based upon the shared beliefs that Heidi and ECEC practitioners had constructed when they worked together.

The informal opportunities to interact with each other happened during visits. These visits were different to those discussed by David in Section 6.2.2. David had explained that the ECEC children and practitioners visited the school for special occasions. Since Heidi had started her new position, teachers, ECEC practitioners, school children and ECEC children visited each other's settings. Elizabeth and Mary explain:

The children that started school in September this year came over to nursery to come and say hello to us, and we get to see how they have developed and they also get to play with the older children that are now sort of thinking about starting. (Focus group, Elizabeth, practitioner, Townmouth)

Because there is already a buzz starting with our pre-schoolers, parents have said they are so excited about going, already. (Focus group, Mary, practitioner, Townmouth)

I think they all do adjust very well and very quickly. When you see them coming back over to visit us and when we go and visit over the school you think 'wow' they have just got into the whole role of it. (Focus group, Elizabeth, practitioner, Townmouth)

The reciprocal visits enabled children, ECEC practitioners and teachers to move back and forth between the reception classroom and the ECEC setting. This movement enabled children and adults to maintain friendships and for the ECEC practitioners to see the children in their new context and role. Mary also explained that these visits started the preparation for the children who would commence school the following year. During this process the younger children were establishing new relationships with adults and children in the school and gaining an awareness of what happens after the move to the reception class. ECEC practitioners and teachers were able to gain insights into the types of experiences children were experiencing at school and in the ECEC setting.

The visits between settings and the meetings provided chances for ECEC practitioners to share information and contextualise the information on the assessment summary that the ECEC practitioners had provided for the teachers. There were also opportunities for the adults to co-construct meanings of the children, learning and their roles in the process. Sarah explained:

Every day I'm getting a bit more early yearsy. (Focus group, Sarah, teacher, Townmouth)

Sarah viewed her practices becoming increasingly influenced by the ECEC ethos. For the children that moved to the reception class, there will be a sense of familiarity in the reception class experiences, as the practices are influenced by the ECEC ethos. The discontinuities and differences that the children experienced after the

move are unlikely to have a long term adverse effect upon their academic learning. This can also explain the consistency in the assessment data and would suggest the children have adjusted to their new environment.

Heidi's move had also caused changes throughout the school.

But our Head has actually said that since I've been here, she feels more early years ethos are going up to school....a lot of the early years practices need to go further up [the school]. (Focus group, Heidi, teacher, Townmouth)

Heidi acknowledged the expectation that soon after starting school the reception children had to take part in the school's rituals. She was also aware that teachers in Year 1 and beyond had different expectations and interpretations of teaching and learning. She discussed in the focus group how she had to make explicit the practices of the EYFS (DfE, 2012a) to her teacher colleagues at opportune times.

One such time was when it was the reception class' turn to lead the assembly.

I just said to the children 'right, it's our assembly tomorrow, what do you want to make to show everyone?' And someone would have found that chaotic, but I saw children do things that they have never done and they all made something; it was so messy, but everybody was on task, ...they were all busy engaged; some were painting, some were designing, some were drawing pictures, some were making out Mobilo, some were just mark-making over a tower, some of them don't want to talk and I said, 'you don't have to talk'. So, tomorrow's assembly will probably be really chaotic, compared to older children, but I actually feel good about that, I need to show the rest of the school that this is what we do in our class. I'm fighting for the early years and if I can, so, tomorrow afternoon might be interesting.... You've got to be confident to fight your ground when no one else understands what you're going on about. (Focus group, Heidi, teacher, Townmouth)

Heidi was able to articulate a different way of supporting children's learning and put it into practice. Her position in the school leadership team enabled the ethos of the early years to be introduced 'further up' the school. Heidi was aware of the pressures of the school culture being imposed on the ECEC ethos. Her use of the terms 'fighting' and 'fight', is recognition that establishing a familiar relationship or a

utopian relationship between those in the reception class and those in KS1 is a difficult process, particularly in contexts where the emphasis is on the preparation of children for their next phase of schooling.

It is only Heidi and the ECEC practitioners that have a relationship with qualities of a utopian relationship. As the teachers and the ECEC practitioners are in the process of co-constructing meanings and practices, after Heidi's move from the ECEC setting to school, the relationship between them has the qualities of a familiar relationship.

8.2.3 Parents and ECEC Practitioners

Whilst there was no explicit reference to the qualities of relationships between parents and ECEC practitioners in the data generated there were possible opportunities for qualities of a utopian relationship between them. Whilst parents and ECEC practitioners made no explicit references to parents returning to the setting to visit, as the ECEC setting was on the school site and parents and ECEC practitioners lived in the same community there would be incidental contact. The incidental contact was increased if the ECEC practitioners were also parents as they were likely to have similar routines as the other parents, such as collecting children from school. Such interactions were discussed earlier by Elizabeth in Section 6.2.1 .

8.3 Comparison of Cases

Table 11 summarises the relationships between those supporting children during the autumn term after the move to the reception class

| | Parent – ECEC practitioner | Teacher – ECEC practitioner | Teacher – Parent |
|-----------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Castleton | Utopian relationship | Distant Relationship | Dominant Relationship |
| Townmouth | Utopian relationship | Familiar relationship | Familiar relationship |

8.3 Table 11: Relationships Between Those as They Support Children During Phase 3 of The Transition

In both cases a utopian relationship remained between parents and ECEC practitioners. In Castleton the relationships between ECEC practitioners and teachers returned to a distant relationship and the relationships between teachers and parents changed to those with the qualities of a dominant relationship. In Townmouth there were qualities of a familiar relationship between teachers and parents, and ECEC practitioners and teachers.

In both cases parents were aware of the importance of communicating with teachers to discuss their children, as the information shared would ensure their children had a successful time at school. In Castleton a dominant relationship prevailed, as communication generally flowed from the teachers to the parents. The information shared was to do with children’s academic learning, as it was the role of other professionals to support parents and their children. The role of the FSA was to support and advise parents on a range of parenting and family issues, while the FLP supported parents’ learning with their children at school. Each adult had a distinct role to support children and their parents. In contrast, Townmouth participants made

no reference to other professionals supporting the families. Heidi and her colleague had developed the communication systems and acknowledged those adults that supported parents by inviting them to the Sunday community afternoon. Many of the qualities of the interactions between teachers and parents were similar to those of the ECEC practitioners, such as informal contexts and acknowledging the whole family and the children's experiences beyond school.

Where there were qualities of a utopian relationship and a consistent familiar relationship there was a back and forth movement between the individuals and settings. In Castleton the qualities of a utopian relationship between parents and ECEC practitioners provided the opportunity for some parents to move back and forth between the teachers and ECEC practitioners. Parents would instigate interactions with ECEC practitioners to ask advice or information about the school. As ECEC practitioners and teachers had qualities of a distant relationship the information that they shared with parents was likely to be based on the ECEC practitioners' observations or upon secondary information from others about school procedures and systems.

In Townmouth, the relationship between ECEC practitioners and teachers had qualities of a utopian relationship. The back and forth movement of the children, ECEC practitioners and teachers was during the visits to each other's setting. The visits provided opportunities for the adults to co-construct meanings of the children, learning and each other's role in the process. The process also supported the ending of old relationships whilst developing new relationships between children and adults. The visits also started the preparation of children who were moving to school the following year.

Participants from the Castleton case had different views to those from the Townmouth case about interacting with each other in the playground. In the Castleton context ECEC practitioners referred to several conversations they had with parents in the playground at the beginning and end of the day and Lynne found the interactions she had with teachers in the playground useful. In contrast, the Townmouth parents, ECEC practitioners and a teacher stated that they found interactions between each other difficult in the playground. In the playground the school culture is less dense (Waite, 2013) compared to the classroom. In Castleton, where the relationships were generally of a dominant and a distant relationship between parents and teachers, it was easier for parents to talk to teacher and ECEC practitioners in the playground. In Townmouth, where the qualities of the relationship were changing from dominant/distant to a familiar relationship, the changes could have caused uncertainty for parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers when interacting with each other. This was likely to remain until they had co-constructed meanings, views of their roles and practices.

In the Townmouth context Heidi took opportunities to explain to her school colleagues the practices and interpretations of the EYFS (DfE, 2012a) that she and the ECEC practitioners had constructed. In this context she was able to resist the schoolification of the ECEC setting and the pressures in the reception year. Heidi explained that it was her confidence that enabled her to challenge the downward pressures, but it could in fact be her position and insights of being a teacher in a school and the teacher in a SSCC that enabled her to challenge these. Her experiences in the SSCC also enabled her to put into practice and articulate other ways of supporting children's learning at school. Whereas in Castleton a possible explanation for the practices of school influencing those of the ECEC setting were

the different perspectives that teachers and ECEC practitioners held of the transition, and that they did not understand each other's practices. In this context Flo and the other ECEC practitioners were unable to resist the schoolification of the ECEC setting by co-constructing meanings with the teachers.

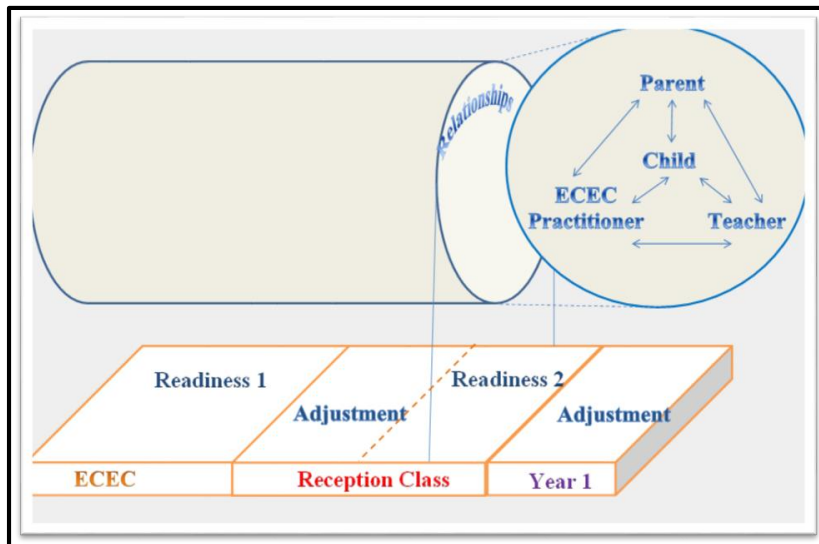
Finally, comparison of the teachers' views on the reliability of the data provided to them by the ECEC practitioners suggest in Townmouth teachers found it useful and accurate, but in Castleton teachers perceived the data unreliable, as discussed in Section 7.1.2. Where there were qualities of a familiar relationship teachers agreed with the data. Where the relationships between teachers and ECEC practitioners had qualities of a dominant relationship the teachers viewed the data as inaccurate. Explanations for these teachers' perceptions of the data could be the different views of children, learning and the adult's role in the process.

Chapter 9: Preparations for Year 1

9 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the relationships between the adults during Phase 4 of the transition, the spring and summer term before children move to Year 1. ECEC practitioners and reception teachers made no reference to working together to prepare children for the transition into Year 1. In the current education system there is no expectation that ECEC practitioners work with reception teachers to prepare children for Year 1. This relationship is not going to be discussed in this chapter. The relationship between ECEC practitioners and teachers, however, is still represented in Figure 13, as in some contexts teachers and ECEC practitioners may both prepare children for Year 1.

Figure 13 represents the relationships between those supporting children to be ready for Year 1 during the spring and summer terms.



9 Figure 13: Phase 4 of The Transition to School

9.1 The Castleton Case

Liam, Louise, and Janet had children who were attending a reception class. When the data was generated these parents were preparing their children for the move from the reception class to Year 1. Lynne, Beth and Rosie draw upon their past experiences of supporting children during a transition.

9.1.1 Parents and Teachers

Findings suggest the dominant relationship between parents and teachers continued during this phase of the transition. At the beginning of the academic year Lynne had been satisfied with the 'quick word' she had with the teacher. During these terms other parents had found the time restraints limited their interactions with teachers.

You have to wait five or ten minutes to speak to the teacher. Then there is always a pressure because there is another parent behind you waiting to talk to the teacher. (Focus group, Liam, parent, Castleton)

Although the teachers were available at the end of the school day, Liam found the pressure of other parents waiting to speak to the teacher inhibiting and not conducive to meaningful two-way conversations. Rosie explained that she had to approach the teacher and ask how her son was doing at school.

Yeah you have got to be really pro-active in schools and go up to the teacher and say; 'how are they doing?' Because otherwise you just don't get anything back really. (Focus group, Rosie, parent, Castleton)

Rosie's comments suggested that unless parents approached teachers or there was a problem with the children's academic progress the teachers did not engage in conversation with parents. Louise's experiences reflected those of Rosie.

Teachers had approached and invited her to a meeting when there had been a dip in her son's academic performance and behaviour.

I have been told by statistics of what is expected of a child of this age by the school. They've said he's behind because he [Kieran] can't count from one to ten. Ohh they say he is very immature for his age and that he needs umm one to one rather than group time because he can't concentrate and he has a very poor attention span Umm, a lot of it is I would say probably down to my mental health, is the fact that one minute I'm up, one minute I'm down. That made me feel really bad as a parent when I was told; 'he's behind on this, he's behind on this and he's behind on this. (Focus group, Louise, parent, Castleton)

Louise's comments suggests her perception of the data discussed by the teachers only provided a limited view of Kieran and his experiences. The teachers implied that it was his immaturity that contributed to his behaviour, poor attention span and his low levels of achievement. This view positioned the issue within-the-child, which is underpinned by Perspective 1 'Transition to School: Development within the Child'. This perspective does not position the blame for Kieran's delay in his learning with Louise's parenting. Louise, however, did attribute her son's delay in his learning to her mental health. Louise's explanation is underpinned by Perspective 2 'The Environmental Transition to School', as she situated the problem in the home environment. This had made her feel she was a bad parent. Louise's account suggests that the different perspectives of the transition created misunderstandings between her and the teachers and did not enable them to co-construct views of Kieran and his learning.

Louise was not the only parent to suggest that the data used by teachers provided a limited picture of the child. During a parent focus group these mothers discussed the use of data and what they believed were the expectations of them.

I think it stems down to every child is different really doesn't it?
(Focus group, Louise, parent, Castleton)

I think they want them all to be the same don't they? (Focus group, Lynne, parent, Castleton)

We have got, we have got to follow what they say, we don't get a say in it do we? Not really. (Focus group, Louise, parent, Castleton)

All they are looking at is numbers and statistics, whereas.....we are looking at the personality, what's in their brains and but they can't see that. (Focus group, Beth, parent, Castleton)

The mothers argued that they have a different knowledge of their children than teachers and that much of this knowledge is not recognised or valued, at school. They mentioned how information from the school data led the discussions which they perceived as flowing in one direction, from teachers to them. Parents' experiences with their children and the learning that happens beyond school is marginalised in these discussions. This resulted in Louise's perception that 'we have got to follow what they say' and that there is little opportunity for teachers to find out about their experiences with their child.

Phyllis, on the other hand, explained she was keen to involve parents in their children's learning. Phyllis described how she had supported them to be involved.

I've really been working hard on involving parents, lots of parents you know, they weren't doing their reading because they didn't know their phonic sounds because they can't read themselves so it's the case of 'come on in', 'welcome', 'we will go through it with you'. So getting them involved in terms of their child's education is really important (Interview, Phyllis, teacher, Castleton)

She attributed the lack of parent involvement as some parents not being able to read or know how to sound out the phonemes. To remedy this she invited them into the class to teach parents how to support their child's reading and learning letter sounds. The involvement is in fact on her terms, the flow of communication predominantly in one direction and the content of the session decided upon by Phyllis. Although Phyllis believed parents were not reading to their children Louise's

discussion in Section 8.1.1 suggests that parents may be reading to children but not books from school.

Throughout the reception year the systems that were introduced at school to prepare the children for learning in Year 1, such as phonics, created further divisions in roles between the parents and teachers. These then positioned the responsibility for children's academic learning with teachers and the responsibility of parents as children's learning beyond school.

9.1.2 Parents and ECEC Practitioners

There were qualities of a utopian relationship between parents and ECEC practitioners, during this phase. Although no parent or ECEC practitioner discussed preparing children for Year 1 opportunities for parents to maintain relationships with the ECEC practitioners continued. These included: when dropping younger children at the ECEC setting, visiting the setting and incidental meetings in the playground and local community. The grandfather who was mentioned in the previous chapter continued to visit Annie (ECEC practitioner) throughout his grand-daughter's reception year.

9.2 The Townmouth Case

The findings presented below are of a tentative nature as data was not generated during this phase of the transition, and participants shared their previous experiences of supporting older children during a transition. These experiences were prior to Heidi and Sarah working in the reception class.

9.2.1 Parents and Teachers

Their comments suggest that there were qualities of a distant relationship between them. Lucy and David explained they viewed there was a division in roles between parents and teachers

We can't teach them everything, because we don't know everything.
(Focus group, Lucy, parent, Townmouth)

Absolutely. Yeah. I'm not a school teacher. (Focus group, David, parent, Townmouth)

The term 'school teacher' also reinforced the division in roles, as teachers teach children academic knowledge and the skills and behaviours associated with school.

Sarah recounted her past experiences in Year 1 of teaching children to write.

It's like cursive writing; some parents don't know how to do it, it's not their fault, but if they're doing it wrong then that's actually hindering your progress with their child. So, sometimes you just think, 'let me do it', because I have to do it in a certain way. (Focus group, Sarah, teacher, Townmouth)

There was a whole-school expectation that children were taught the cursive style of writing. This strategy caused challenges in the relationships between parents and teachers and limited opportunities for teachers to find out about the writing at home.

9.2.2 Parents and ECEC Practitioners

Again there was no explicit reference to the qualities of relationships between parents and ECEC practitioners in the data generated, but the possible opportunities to foster relationships with the qualities of a utopian relationship continued. Opportunities to foster these included when parents took younger children to the ECEC setting, when parents and ECEC practitioners had incidental meetings on the school site, or in the local community.

9.3 Comparison of Cases

Table 12 summarises the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers in both cases, during the spring and summer terms before Year 1.

| | Parent – ECEC practitioner | Teacher – ECEC practitioner | Teacher– Parent |
|-----------|--|--------------------------------|--|
| Castleton | Utopian relationship | No data | Dominant relationship |
| Townmouth | <i>Utopian relationship</i> ⁸ | No data | <i>Distant</i> ⁹ <i>relationship</i> |

9.3 Table 12: Relationships Between Those Supporting Children During Phase 4 of The Transition

The qualities of a utopian relationship between parents and ECEC practitioners in both cases are likely to continue during this period. In Castleton there were qualities of a dominant relationship between the parents and teachers and in Townmouth there were qualities of a distant relationship between them.

The distant and a dominant relationship between parents and teachers were reinforced by the physical environment, routines, data and teaching strategies. The environment and the qualities of the relationships created a division in roles between teachers and parents. The teachers' role was to teach children academic skills and knowledge for school whilst parents cared and educated them beyond school. This then led to the learning and knowledge in both contexts tending to become separate and isolated from each other, for example, cursive writing at school and other styles of writing at home. These views of each other's roles can

⁸ The qualities of this relationships is italicised as data is limited and parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers were commenting on their previous relationships and experiences with each other.

⁹ As above

explain the parents' accounts that unless there was an issue with a child's academic learning or behaviour at school teachers did not approach them.

Whilst it can be viewed that it is the role of the teacher to support children's academic learning there was also an expectation that parents support their child's academic learning at home. Soon after starting school, as Lynne explained in Section 8.1.1, teachers had sent home homework for parents to do with their children. Initially the homework was informal but as the move to Year 1 drew closer there was an expectation that parents support children's academic learning. Phyllis taught parents the phonemes so that they could support their children's reading skills. The changing expectations could cause confusion for parents as well as reinforcing the division in roles.

In both cases the qualities of a utopian relationship between ECEC practitioners and parents continued. There were no formal planned opportunities for ECEC practitioners to work with parents to prepare the children for learning in Year 1, but incidental meetings in the school playground and visits to the ECEC setting planned by the parents provided opportunities to share and discuss information with each other, some of which could be to do with school. Despite the Castleton school leadership providing the role of the FSA to support parents with a range of issues, some parents, like the grandfather, preferred to return to discuss issues with the ECEC practitioner with whom they already had a relationship.

Table 13 summarises the qualities of the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers during the four phases of the transition.

| Case | Unit of analysis | Phase 1 | Phase 2 | Phase 3 | Phase 4 |
|-----------|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Castleton | Parent/ECEC practitioner relationship | Utopian relationship | Utopian relationship | Utopian relationship | Utopian relationship |
| | ECEC practitioner/teacher relationship | Distant relationship | Dominant relationship | Distant relationship | No data |
| | Parent/teacher relationship | Distant relationship | Familiar relationship | Dominant relationship | Dominant relationship |
| Townmouth | Parent/ECEC practitioner relationship | Utopian relationship | Utopian relationship | Familiar relationship | <i>Utopian relationship</i> |
| | ECEC practitioner/teacher relationship | Dominant relationship | Familiar relationship | Familiar relationship | No data |
| | Parent/teacher relationship | Distant relationship | Familiar relationship | Familiar relationship | <i>Distant relationship</i> |

9.3 Table 13: Relationships and Interactions Throughout The Transition

In Castleton the relationships between parents and the ECEC practitioners generally had qualities of a utopian relationship. Between parents and teachers, and between ECEC practitioners and teachers, the relationships had qualities of a dominant or a distant relationship. Parents explained they had experienced relationships with qualities of a familiar relationship between themselves and teachers, but these were only temporary. In Townmouth during Phase 1 of the transition there had been qualities of a distant relationship or a dominant relationship between teachers and parents/ECEC practitioners, but since Heidi became the reception teacher, these relationships had qualities of a familiar

relationship. Unlike the familiar relationship in Castleton these remained consistent across two phases of the transition.

Findings of the comparison of the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers suggested that relationships with certain qualities do change during the transition, but others do not. The changes in the qualities of relationship and children's readiness and adjustment to school are discussed further in the following chapter in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 10: Discussion and Conclusion

10 Introduction

This thesis began by outlining the changes in the provision for children under five-years-old, in England. Those in government generally hold the view that school-ready children are more likely to have a successful transition to school, which in turn will affect their academic achievements and longer term life chances. These beliefs have led to an emphasis on children's school readiness and preparations for school learning throughout the EYFS. The focus on children's school readiness overlooks the phase of adjustment to school and the relationships between the adults that prepare and support children.

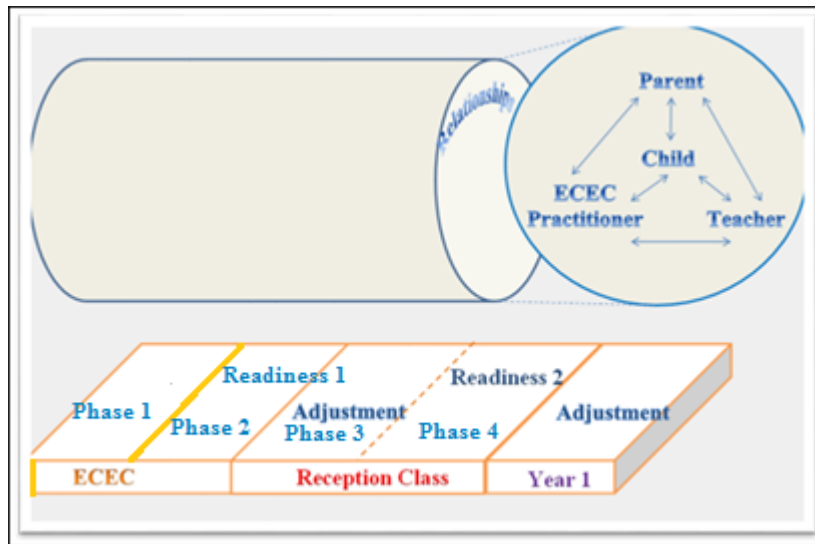
This study explored parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs and relationships, as they supported children during the transition to school. This chapter summarises the findings of the research in relation to the research questions, and discusses implications for practice and policy. Limitations of the study are also considered, and areas for further research identified. Before the summary of the key findings, my conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School' is revisited.

10.1 The Conceptual Framework 'The Relational Transition to School'

The major contribution that this thesis makes to the understanding of the transition to school is the conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School', Figure 8 section 2.4. The conceptual framework includes both transitions with which school readiness is associated in England; the institutional transition, and the curriculum transition. This framework also represents a child's state of readiness for school as

only one aspect of the transition as well as a child’s adjustment to school after the move.

Analysis of the data further developed the model Figure 8 section 2.4 ‘The Relational Transition to School’ by extending the children’s transition to school over four phases. These are represented in Figure 14.



10.1 Figure 14 The Relational Transition to School

The four phases of the transition are: Phase 1 from the beginning of the autumn term to the end of the spring term before the move to the reception class; Phase 2 during the summer term before this move; Phase 3 from the children’s first day in the reception class to the end of the autumn term; and finally Phase 4 which was during the spring and summer term before the move to Year 1.

Building on Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta’s (2000) assertion that the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, are influential in children’s adjustment to school, I identified four types of relationships, which are a distant relationship, a dominant relationship, a familiar relationship, and a utopian relationship. Each relationship has different qualities. To summarise, the qualities

of a distant relationship is characterised by limited or no interactions between groups. In a dominant relationship information about children's academic learning and behaviours generally flows from the group receiving the children to those preparing the children. A familiar relationship has qualities of a utopian relationship but understandings are not embedded across groups. Finally, in a utopian relationship there is two-way communication about children's experiences and the cognitive, affective and attitudinal domains of learning, and meanings have been co-constructed and continue to be constructed during the transition. The qualities of these relationships were described in more detail in the introduction to Chapter 6. The analytical insights of this study indicate that relationships with certain qualities are likely to change, but also identify when this would be and give possible explanations for these changes. My findings also suggest which qualities of the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers are more likely to support, and which are more likely to hinder children's adjustment to school.

'The Relational Transition to School' provides researchers with a framework to chronologically order and systematically analyse the data to explore parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs and relationships during the four phases of children's transition to school.

10.1.1 What are parents', ECECC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs about school readiness and their roles in preparing children to be in the state of school readiness?

School readiness is a difficult term to define (Meisels, 1999). This study identifies further complexity in defining the term in England, which can explain possible misunderstandings when the term is referred to in policy and practice. School readiness can be associated with two vertical transitions that children are prepared

for during the EYFS. The first transition, an institutional transition, is from ECEC setting to the school reception class. The second transition, a curriculum transition, is from an environment guided by the EYFS (2012a) to an environment guided by the KS1 NC. The use of the term school readiness at both transitions is likely to create further confusion as the term can have different expectations of children and of those preparing them.

In this study there was a general consensus between the research participants that the expectation of children's school readiness at the institutional transition is not primarily the knowledge, skills and behaviours for school. Participants also wanted children to be independent in their social and personal skills and have positive attitudes and dispositions towards change. For the curriculum transition, children's school readiness is generally associated with the skills, knowledge and behaviours for school learning.

Whilst there was this general agreement about the expectations of children's school readiness between the research participants, in practice there are also inconsistencies in these expectations. The nudging down of the school starting age could contribute to these inconsistencies. Although the statutory school starting age has remained the same, school admission policies have changed. It is standard practice that children start the school reception class in the September after their fourth birthday. A consequence of the earlier school starting age can be that the expectations of school readiness at the curriculum transition trickle down to the institutional transition. The trickling down of these expectations can lead to teachers and ECEC practitioners holding different expectations of children's school readiness.

ECEC practitioners explained their practices had changed over the years. Previously they had provided discrete sessions to teach the children who were about to start school the skills, knowledge and behaviours for school. The children that were being prepared were older than some of the children ECEC practitioners are preparing today, particularly those that have their fifth birthday in the spring and summer terms. The age of the children can be one explanation as to why the ECEC practitioners' practices have changed. Also, since the introduction of the EYFS, instead of these activities and preparations happening just before children start school these are now embedded in the curriculum, regardless of the children's age.

In the context of this study the nudging down of the school starting age has also created a social pressure for some parents to ensure that their child is ready for school sooner. If a child is deemed as not ready his/her parents could fear that their child will be viewed as different or falling behind in their learning and development and this could imply that they are not providing good parenting. Interventions such as the Troubled Family programme, mentioned in Section 1.1, could reinforce these concerns particularly for parents who meet the criteria of such programmes. The standardised starting date does not appear to have provided greater choice for all parents, which was Rose's (2009) justification for his recommendation for a single point of entry to school.

Participants in this study held the view that it was the role of parents and ECEC practitioners to prepare children for the transition from the ECEC setting to the reception class and the teachers' role to prepare children for Year 1. This can explain why some teachers became involved in the preparations for the institutional transition just prior to the children's move to school. This study also found that when ECEC practitioners and teachers held similar views of the expectations of children

at the institutional transition and had qualities of a consistent familiar relationship between them teachers became involved in the preparations for the children's move during Phase 1 of the transition.

Parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers made no explicit reference to adjustment, but the reception year is viewed as a bridge between the ECEC setting and Year 1. During this year children and teachers move back and forth between the play-based pedagogy of the ECEC setting and the formal academic learning of Year 1. These practices are best explained by the 'The Environmental Transition to School' perspective (Finger 5, Section 2.2) and can explain the distinct roles of the adults preparing the children.

Whilst there was a belief that it is the teachers' role to prepare children for Year 1 there were discrepancies in the expectations of the role of parents during the reception year. On the one hand parents are expected to work in partnership with teachers by supporting their children's academic learning at home, as homework was provided and parents were taught how to support children's literacy skills. On the other hand the teaching strategies used by teachers could lead to parents' involvement being viewed as a hindrance. These inconsistencies are likely to cause uncertainty for some parents and can explain why they become less involved in their children's learning at school (OfSTED, 2014).

Analysis of the discussions about the term school readiness and the roles of those preparing children suggests that when there is a consensus in beliefs and expectations of school readiness at both transitions, parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers had qualities of a utopian relationship or a consistent familiar relationship between them. Whilst parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers who

had qualities of a dominant relationship or a distant relationship between them appeared to hold different beliefs and expectations of school readiness at the institutional transition. The relationships and interactions between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, and how these evolve during the transition, are discussed further below.

10.1.2 What are the qualities of the relationships and interactions between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers and how do these change as they prepare and support children during the transition to school?

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) suggest that the relationships between the adults during children's transition to school are not static but are dynamic. In this study the exploration of the qualities of relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers would partially corroborate Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) assertion, as relationships with certain qualities did change whereas others did not. Where there were qualities of either a distant relationship or a dominant relationship between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, these did change during the four phases of the transition. Relationships between participants, which had qualities of a familiar relationship, could either be of a temporary nature or remain constant across more than one phase of the transition. Finally, relationships between those with qualities of a utopian relationship were less likely to change.

The temporary nature of the familiar relationship between teachers and parents could be explained by the motivation of teachers in establishing relationships with ECEC practitioners and parents. For instance, an expectation of the EYFS (DfE, 2012) is for ECEC practitioners and teachers to work in partnership with parents (DfE, 2012; Goodall & Montgomery, 2013; OfSTED, 2014). Also at a local level the LA policies expected the ECEC practitioners and teachers to share information

about children's learning with each other (Southward LA, 2012). This can explain the introduction of systems such as visits to each other's settings, transition groups and meetings to share summaries of children's learning and development. Whilst these systems would suggest there are qualities of a familiar relationship between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, the systems can also be easily monitored by those beyond the setting. The systems can be used in a superficial manner and do not necessarily encourage or support parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers to consider long held beliefs and views or to co-construct meanings. The qualities of a familiar relationship were more likely to remain consistent when the teachers' motivation was to develop different practices and relationships with parents and ECEC practitioners and to co-construct meaning with them.

Findings also suggest that the qualities of the relationships between parents and teachers are likely to influence the qualities of the relationships between parents and ECEC practitioners. In the context where there were qualities of a familiar relationship between parents and teachers there were fewer accounts of parents asking ECEC practitioners for advice. Where there were generally qualities of a dominant or a distant relationship between teachers and parents, parents would continue to seek support and information from the ECEC practitioners even after their children had started school.

Leading on from the discussion about the influences of the qualities of relationships at a local level in this study there was also indication the qualities of relationships are influenced by changes beyond the local context. This can be seen, for instance, in the government's restructuring of the SSCCs and the inclusion of the term school readiness in the EYFS (DfE, 2012). Changes in national and local government

policies can instigate a change at a local level which then influences the qualities of the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers.

Findings of this study would concur with Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) assertion that relationships between those supporting the children during the transition are likely to support children's adjustment to the reception class. In contexts where the relationships had the qualities of a utopian and a consistent familiar relationship between teachers and parent and/or ECEC practitioners, across more than one phase of the transition, children were described as adjusting quickly to school by parents, teachers and ECEC practitioners. Conversely, where the relationships generally had qualities of a distant relationship and a dominant relationship between the adults there were accounts from participants that some children took longer to adjust to school.

This discussion leads to the third research question, which provides further insights into the possible explanation of why relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and parents can support children's adjustment to school.

10.1.3 What opportunities are there to co-construct beliefs about the child, learning and each other's role in the process? What happens when parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers are provided with a space to co-construct meanings?

The discussion in the previous section explained that where parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers had relationships with qualities of a consistent familiar relationship or a utopian relationship, children adjusted to school soon after starting. It is likely that these children encountered fewer differences and discontinuities during the transition, as parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers held similar beliefs about what children were being prepared for, about children, and their

learning and about their role in the process. The findings of this study propose that it is the quality of relationship between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers that enables those preparing and supporting the children during the transition to co-construct meaning. Below I discuss the structures and systems that foster the relationships and the opportunities that enable parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers to co-construct meanings.

Parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers are more likely to engage in the process of co-constructing meaning when they have either shared experiences or similar funds of knowledge. These are likely to create a sense of familiarity between the adults and limit perceptions of the other as being a stranger or a competitor. Parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers who do not have similar funds of knowledge or shared experiences can still have relationships with qualities of a consistent familiar relationship or a utopian relationship, by acknowledging each other's knowledge and experiences with the children, and viewing these as different but complimentary (Easen et al, 1992) to their own knowledge and experiences. When there was a familiarity or acknowledgement of each other's knowledge and experiences with the children, between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, they were less likely to view their roles as distinct and more likely to engage in the process of co-constructing meanings.

Where there were qualities of a distant relationship and a dominant relationship between teachers and parents/ECEC practitioners, teachers generally perceived their role as supporting children's academic learning and the role of the parents and ECEC practitioners as being to prepare children for school. Not only were the roles of parents and teachers distinct but in the school there were distinct roles between school personnel. For instance, it was the role of the Family Support Advisor to

establish relationships and support parents with issues beyond school, the Family Learning Practitioner to support parents' learning with their children at school and the teacher to teach children. The division in roles between teacher, school personnel and parents can reinforce parents' view that their children's learning at school is not their responsibility but the responsibility of the teacher. The division in roles may not only limit opportunities for parents and teachers to co-construct meanings but can also lead to learning experiences in and beyond school as being separate from each other.

In Section 10.1.1 it was mentioned that the qualities in relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers influenced when teachers would become involved in the preparations for the transition. In contexts where the relationships had qualities of either a distant relationship or dominant relationship, preparations began in the second phase of the transition. As the preparations started later this provided fewer opportunities for adults preparing children to co-construct meanings. Parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers who had relationships with qualities of a utopian or a consistent familiar relationship started preparations during the first phase of the transition. Throughout the year there were opportunities for teachers and ECEC practitioners to co-construct meanings as they moved back and forth between the ECEC setting and school. Caution is required when considering the back and forth movement of the adults between each other. One such example is where there are qualities of a utopian relationship between parents and ECEC practitioners, and qualities of a distant relationship or a dominant relationship between parents and the teachers. The back and forth movement of parents between teachers and ECEC practitioners, during phases three and four of the transition, could reinforce the qualities of these relationships, perceptions of each

other and subsequently limit opportunities for parents and teachers to co-construct meaning.

It also became apparent that the quality of the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers may well influence the preferred environments in which they interact with each other. Where there were qualities of a dominant and a distant relationship parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers appeared more comfortable to interact in environments such as the playground where the school culture was less dense and where there was less control over how and what information was shared and who shared it. Where there were qualities of a consistent familiar relationship between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers these adults were less confident to interact in such environments, whereas they were comfortable to interact in the classroom or ECEC setting. It is likely that parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers are in the process of co-constructing meanings of their roles, learning and the child. During this process it is more comfortable for these adults to engage with each other in a context where there are some familiar rules that govern the relationships and communication between the groups.

This now leads to a discussion about what happens when parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers are provided with a space to co-construct meanings. This study has highlighted that in contexts where the qualities of the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers were either of distant relationship and dominant relationship, participants were more cautious about engaging in this discussion during the symposium. Whereas, where there were qualities of a consistent familiar or a utopian relationship between participants, they

were more likely to engage in the process of constructing meaning during the research process.

The qualities of the relationships between participants could offer an explanation as to why participants in Castleton were more reticent to talk. Another reason that could have limited the conversation was the size of the group. The Castleton group was much larger than the group in Townmouth. In future research I would limit the number of participants in all focus groups.

10.2 My Position as a Researcher

Reflecting upon my research journey, it has become apparent that my historical experiences (Somekh & Lewin, 2005) have shaped my positionality as a researcher in relation to the participants. My journey to becoming an SSCC teacher was not a conventional one as I left school with few qualifications and unhappy memories of a schooling career, which deterred me from a career in schools. I was unable to study the NNEB (Nursery Nursing Examination Board) at my local college due to not having the sufficient grades; however, I was able to fund my studies at a private nursery training college. At college I enjoyed learning about the theories of child development and how to care for babies and young children. On reflection my greatest learning was social. I had attended a large state comprehensive school in a deprived area in south-west England between 1976 and 1980. People from a range of backgrounds attended the school, but they were generally white and working class. At the private nursery training college, and in my subsequent employment as a nanny, I met people who came from a different social group in society. I came to realise that the structures and systems in society valued some

groups of people's experiences and knowledge more than others and this either enabled or prevented their access to activities/opportunities.

In the early 1990s I decided on a career change. I established and developed a private ECEC setting. It was always my intention that the ECEC setting should provide a rich environment for children where the ECEC practitioners were recognised as professionals who worked under good terms and conditions. My aspiration became reality as during this period ECEC moved from the periphery to central government policy making, as discussed in Chapter 1. The changes motivated me to return to formal education and study to be an ECEC teacher; I was in my mid-thirties. I successfully completed my Bachelor of Education degree in 2003. This was a turning point as I had changed my view of myself as a learner (Elder, 1998). I was no longer someone who did not succeed in formal education but instead I had achieved a graduate qualification and saw myself as fully capable of learning and contributing to knowledge. I experienced first-hand the transformative nature of education when in an enabling context. After qualifying, I secured the position as SSLP teacher as it would be an opportunity to work with parents and communities to shape the services and provision for their children with them.

My background as an ECEC practitioner and as someone who did not have a successful school career clearly positions me in relation to the issues raised in this research, but also enables me to relate to those who perceive themselves as marginalised. These insights would shape how I involved participants and interacted and related to them in the context of the research, which was discussed in Chapter 4. The sense of familiarity that I had with parents and ECEC practitioners

might explain why these groups were more likely to be involved in the research compared with teachers. This was also discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.6.

10.3 My Developing Beliefs about School Readiness

In an ideal world, I would prefer not to use the term 'school readiness', as I believe the term can narrow the expectations of children to just academic skills and behaviours for school and can also create division between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers, as their roles are viewed as distinct from each other. The division can then position each in deficit relative to one or other, particularly if one group is perceived as not preparing children to be ready for school. I have become aware during my doctoral studies that avoiding the term school readiness does not contribute to the debate or offer other perspectives. The development of the conceptual model 'The Relational Transition to School' has supported my current understanding of the term. I now have an explicit understanding that in England there are two transitions with which school readiness is associated, and at each there are different expectations of children and those adults that prepare them. I also observe that children's readiness for school is only part of the transition, as children also require time to adjust to school. Therefore there is a phase of preparation and a phase of adjustment and both phases can extend over the course of a year. Finally I am aware that the qualities of the relationships are influential in children's readiness and adjustment to school, and that children are more likely to have a positive transition when parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers have relationships with qualities of a consistently familiar or a utopian relationship when preparing and supporting children.

10.4 Limitations of The Study

The proposed conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School' was a useful tool to systematically analyse the data, but a limitation of my research was in the breadth of data. The data was generated during three of the four phases of the transition. In Castleton it was generated during Phases 2 and 4, the summer term, and in Townmouth during Phase 3, the autumn term. Consequently data presented in both cases for Phase 1, in Castleton for Phase 3, and in Townmouth for Phases 2 and 4 of the transition, offer tentative insights into the participants' relationships and beliefs. The data presented draws upon participants' previous experiences of preparing and supporting children during a transition. Despite this, participants provided a range of insights throughout the transition that supported the development of the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework, The Relational Transition to School, now provides the basis for systematic exploration of parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs, experiences and relationships during the four phases of the transition.

Another limitation of my study relates to the first three questions of the interview schedule (Appendix 1). These primarily focused on the participants' experiences of change during their life-course. My rationale for including these questions in the interview schedule was to put the participants at ease. In selecting these questions, I drew upon my insider knowledge of the ECEC setting. As discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.5.2. Castleton parents and ECEC practitioners were familiar with reflective practices and reflecting on their life experiences to make sense of their beliefs and actions when planning experiences for children's learning. On reflection the first three questions generated a lot of data which have not contributed directly

to the study. Also there was the possibility that these questions might position participants in a vulnerable situation, as participants were discussing their personal experiences. This was discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.8.3. My familiarity with the setting and the local families attending the setting meant that I was in a strong position to manage this potential vulnerability. However, when designing future research it is important to anticipate ways in which all participants might be vulnerable, and this should include reflecting on the researcher's relationships with participants and how these might position them during the research. After considering these issues when researching peoples' experiences during children's transition to school I would put participants at ease by asking them about a positive transition that they and their children had experienced. This would also apply to any other experience that I was researching with participants.

10.5 Implications of The Study in Practice and Policy

The findings of this study makes explicit that there are two vertical transitions children are being prepared for during the EYFS, an institutional transition and a curriculum transition. A recommendation for ECEC practitioners and teachers when making policies and developing practices is to consider their local context, identify the transitions with which school readiness is associated, and together with parents identify what is expected of children at each transition. Children could also be encouraged to be part of this process, as they also have expectations of what they will be doing at school.

The conceptual frame also makes explicit that children's readiness for and adjustment to school are two phases of the transition. Just as I have suggested that parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers consider expectations of readiness, I

encourage them to also consider the phase of adjustment to school and the practices that will support children's adjustment. Instead of viewing the reception year as primarily preparation for Year 1 the reception year could also be viewed as a phase of children's adjustment to school.

As relationships between those preparing and supporting children during the transition to school are key to children's adjustment, then practices in the reception class can provide opportunities that enable parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers to move towards a utopian or a consistent familiar relationship. This study has highlighted practices that are likely to support ECEC practitioners and teachers to foster these relationships with each other and with parents. These will include formal opportunities to establish relationships and co-construct meaning but also informal opportunities. Informal opportunities include the backward and forward movement when teachers and ECEC practitioners visit each other's settings and the interactions between the adults in contexts where the school culture is less dense, such as in the playground. A specific role for ECEC practitioners is to support and encourage parents to establish relationships with teachers and school personnel, particularly those parents who may be less confident about approaching teachers and school personnel.

This then leads to recommendations for policy makers. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) suggest that the qualities of the relationships between parents and teachers are considered an outcome of children's transition to school. This study has provided insights into the qualities of relationship that are more likely to support children's adjustment to school. A recommendation for policy makers is to promote policies that foster a consistent familiar relationship and a utopian relationship between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers. This would require a change

in approach when monitoring the performance of ECEC practitioners and teachers. Instead of focusing upon assessing children's learning and development, such as the baseline assessment in the reception class, there could also be a consideration of how relationships with the qualities of a consistent familiar relationship and a utopian relationship are fostered between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers. The EYFS (DfE, 2014) can afford such possibilities as teachers and ECEC practitioners are guided by the same framework, and are expected to establish a 'strong partnership' (DfE, 2012:6) with parents.

10.6 Areas for Further Research

The conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School' was developed and used to provide insights into the relationships and interactions between the adults as they prepared and supported children during the transition to school. Exploration of the relationships in other socio-economic and cultural groups would gain further insights and extend the perceptions illuminated by this thesis. Further research would offer views of the relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers in contexts where, for example, children and their families' cultural heritage generally reflect those of the school.

The conceptual framework 'The Relational Transition to School' also allows for modification. For instance in this study, as in many other English contexts, there are two transitions that are associated with school readiness during the EYFS, the first the institutional transition from ECEC setting to the reception class and the second the curriculum transition from an environment guided by the EYFS (DfE, 2012) to the KS1 NC. In another context children may start school at two-years old,

as school leaders are being encouraged to take the two-year-olds from the lowest socio-economic group. Modification of the framework would provide opportunities to explore parents', ECEC practitioners' and teachers' beliefs and relationships in such contexts. Through a consideration of these issues, additional insights into the contexts and qualities of relationships between parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers as they prepare and support children during the transition can be further identified and discussed.

This study has focused on the beliefs and experiences of parents, ECEC practitioners and teachers. Although the voice of the child may not be apparent I am mindful that starting school is generally an exciting time for them (Brooker, 2002). This understanding should guide those when developing practice, policy and research. During one of my visits to the Castleton ECEC setting Jasmine told me (research journal 21st May 2013) what she was expecting when she starts school.

Jasmine: What are you doing here?

Researcher: I am finding out about starting school.

Jasmine: I am going to start school in September. I am going to be a big girl, like my sister, have a book bag and learn to read.

Appendix 1: Interview questions for parents

Throughout a person's life they will experience many changes (Elder, 1998): from starting and leaving school, starting a new job, finishing a job, moving in with a partner, having children. I would like to hear about the changes in your life, how you learnt to cope with them and how you support/prepare your children during a change.

Below are the questions that I will ask you.

1. First of all, can I ask you about your past experiences of change?

To help you do this I suggest you draw a timeline, starting with when you were a child yourself, and going up to the present day.

2. Can you tell me in more depth what was happening during these times of change?

3. Is there anything else you would tell me about the times of change in your life?

4. What changes has your child/have your children experienced?

5. How did you support them during these changes?

6. How do you think you learnt to do this?

7. What skills do you think are important for your child/ren when they start school?

8. What/who helped you to prepare your child for school/nursery?

9. What advice would you give to someone who was support their child during a change?

10. Any other comments about your experiences of changes in your life or your child's life?

Appendix 2: Information sheet

Parents', ECEC Practitioners' and School teachers' experiences of transitions and understanding of school readiness.

PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET for Parents

October 2013

The Department for Education (DfE) states the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is 'more focused on making sure children start school ready and able to learn' (DfE 2012). Before children start school parents are the first educators of their child. This role is then shared with Early Years practitioners when the child starts an Early Years setting. Parents and practitioners are then partners in the child's learning and development. Therefore I would like to explore parents' and practitioners', who use and work at Castleton/Townmouth, views and experiences of supporting and preparing children for the move to school and understanding of school readiness.

When the child starts school school teachers and parents are then partners that support the child. Therefore teachers from local schools will also be invited to talk about their experiences of supporting new children in their class. It is hoped that through talking together parents, Early Years practitioners and school teachers will gain an understanding of each others roles hopes during the change and understanding of school readiness.

Research methods

During the course of the autumn term parents, early years practitioners and school teachers will be invited to take part in a focus group. In the focus group you will discuss recurring themes from that others have said about children starting school and policy documents.

Another focus group will be held with teachers and EY practitioners. You will then be able to share your beliefs and understanding with them.

Karen Wickett will facilitate the discussion during the focus groups.

Up to two hours have been allocated for the focus groups.

Venue

The venue of the focus groups will be in the family room Castleton ECEC.

The venue of the meeting place is Castleton SSCC

Participation in the project

All participation in the project is voluntary. You can choose to participate in the focus group and/or meeting with teachers and EY practitioners. You can withdraw from the research at any time until the data collection process is complete. Choosing not to participate, or withdrawal from the project, will in not affect the relationships between you

and others at setting/school, or Karen Wickett or other Plymouth University staff. You do not need to provide a reason should you choose to withdraw.

Confidentiality and data security

Only my tutors, the person transcribing the focus groups and myself will have access to the audio tapes and focus groups transcripts.

All efforts will be made to ensure data remains anonymous. At the beginning of each focus group participants will be asked to not discuss, with others beyond the group, any issues that were mentioned in the focus group that could cause anyone harm.

All data will be destroyed ten years after the completion of the project, in line with current University policy.

Reporting and debriefing

I shall write a report of my findings and share it with all participants.

I intend that the data will be used in journal articles, conference papers and contribute to my doctoral thesis.

Contact details

If you have any questions, please contact:

Karen Wickett

Email: Karen.Wickett@plymouth.ac.uk


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Plymouth University
Plymouth
PL4 8AA

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP WITH THIS RESEARCH

Appendix 3: Focus Group PowerPoint

04/06/2015

Transitions and School Readiness



Play,
Learn
and
Grow...
together!

Expectation of policy

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life.

(DfE, 2012, p.2)

'I think it's a lot of communication for school readiness.'

(Amber)

'School readiness' has become central to some country's government policy.

Practitioner preparing children

Today I split my group so I had another member of staff that could help me so I split the group and did some more school readiness kind of stuff for the older children while the other staff read a book and sang songs to the younger children

(Annie)

Parent preparing her child


I keep mentioning it, with her wiping herself, I have sort of said you can't do that at school. You have to do it yourself; you can't shout for people, you have to do it yourself I've tried, with like cutting her food up and stuff. Like I keep mentioning school

(Samantha)

She does like workbooks with numbers in and alphabet and I think they do a little bit of that here as well

(Samantha)

School Readiness



Politicians' beliefs about the skills needed to be school ready

'Teachers report to me that a growing number of children cannot form letters or even hold a pencil. Many cannot sit and listen. Many can scarcely communicate orally, let alone frame a question'

(Gove, M, 2011)

'We want children to learn to listen to a teacher, learn to respect an instruction, so that they are ready for school.'

(Hunt, J, 2011)

Being able to write their name and being able to recognise their name, being able to recognise the same numbers in sequence, that kind of skills. Umm, while I think they are useful, I think, at the start it needs to be more about things like resilience. I think the skills that they need are more about, their learning and I think it is those dispositions and attitudes that they need to take with them that umm, we need to support them to be able to be resilient and obviously it is going to be such a change for them I think it's more about looking after their well being and just making sure that they are confident

(Lily)

Parents, practitioners and teachers believe

- **Personal skills** - cut her food up, basic life skills, dressing themselves and undressing, put their own shoes on, take themselves off to the toilet
- **Social skills** - fit in, knowing how to behave in public or even in the setting, being way from a parent, listening and engaging with others, make friends, communicate their needs, get to know the teachers

- **Emotional development** - well-being, resilience, confidence, self management
- **Attitudes to learning** - open to possibilities of learning, positive disposition for learning, a wish to explore and investigate
- **Academic skills** - write letters, being able to sit down and pay attention and concentrate, name recognition, count to 10, able to communicate

- I'm not overly worried if they can write or not, I don't think that is important (Amber)
- I don't necessarily think they need to be counting to ten or anything like that (Clare)

When should they/be school ready?

At the beginning of the reception year?

Or when they have to attend school?

The child does not have to attend school until the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday.

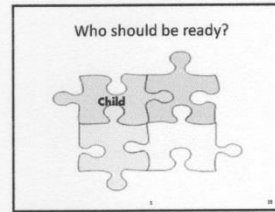
'I do believe sometimes that the school age is just a little bit too young. Umm and they look to young in their little school uniforms out in the playground.'

(Clare)

'He liked the uniform' (Ken)



'That kind of stuff you know getting that uniform and talking about it, is ...preparation' (Rosie)



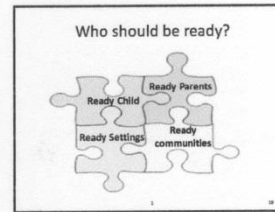
...the responsibility to become "ready" for school rests not with the individual child but with a community.

(Duckett, S & Perry, B. 2001)

'Umm, I think it's completely individual, and I think the environment that the school provides has to be adaptable ...I can't sit here and give you a list of ten things children need to be able to do from the day they start school.'

'People talk about children coming that aren't independently going to the toilet. That can be logistically quite difficult. Umm, but I haven't had a year yet where I haven't had a reception child come who, you needs support in that kind of self care. So I wouldn't say that children need to be able to do that before they come to school.'


(Richard)



Who should be ready?

- Children's readiness can be strengthened through supporting parents' engagement with their child's learning and education
- Schools' readiness can be monitored and practical strategies introduced to ensure successful transitions
- Readiness is also a **community responsibility**, for ensuring that the child's right to more equitable and excellent services is realised

Transitions



Definition of Transition

'.....whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as a result in change of role, setting or both.'

(Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p.24)

'.....reorganisation of roles.'

(after Fthenakis 1998)

Transitions occur throughout the life span and often serve as a direct impetus for developmental change.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1986 p. 224)

'There was other changes, going from school to work umm, but I didn't, I just saw that as a natural thing that everybody does, is go from being at school to working, it's not really a change of stuff it's just a signal of you growing up you know'.

(Liam)

'But I think the main primary school change was almost the changes in my role as a pupil... yeah, umm, becoming a bit older and having a say, which was a positive thing'.

(Richard)

Who should be ready?

- Children's readiness can be strengthened through supporting parents' engagement with their child's learning and education
- Schools' readiness can be monitored and practical strategies introduced to ensure successful transitions
- Readiness is also a **community responsibility**, for ensuring that the child's right to more equitable and excellent services is realised

Formal Transition Systems

- Home visits
- Key person approach
- Settling in visits
- Sharing information
- Transitional objects
- Transition group
- School visits
- Parent meetings
- Settling in visits
- Home PLOD - language
- School Entry Plans
- Line management
- Parent workshops
- Talking to teachers, about what to do next at home
- Reading books about children starting school
- Taster days
- Picture books of school environment
- Transfer form - learning journeys
- Two year old developmental check
- Applications to schools

Informal ways of supporting transition

- Talking and explaining
- Giving cuddles
- Listening
- Friendship
- Flexible systems
- Recognising uniqueness
- Being given control
- Decision making
- Reflecting home knowledge into the setting
- Understanding transitions are processes
- Emphasising the positives of the transition
- Being consistent
- Making it fun

Systems - flexible, individual, sense of control

'The transition to nursery was easy really. Nursery helped a lot with that because you were able stay here with them for the first couple of weeks or something. We just do a half day here and so on and make it really gradual process. Whereas with school, for Henry it was just right school starts today, that's it, eight hours a day for the next eleven years'.

(Rosie)

'The transition to nursery was easy really. Nursery helped a lot with that because you were able to stay here with them for the first couple of weeks or something. We just do a half day here and so on and make it really gradual process. Whereas with school, for Henry it was just right school starts today, that's it, eight hours a day for the next eleven years.'

(Rosie)

Table: Schedule for September 2013 (week)

| Day | Time | Activity |
|--------|---------------|---------------|
| Monday | 8:30 - 9:00 | Registration |
| Monday | 9:00 - 9:30 | Circle Time |
| Monday | 9:30 - 10:00 | Story Time |
| Monday | 10:00 - 10:30 | Free Play |
| Monday | 10:30 - 11:00 | Snack Time |
| Monday | 11:00 - 11:30 | Outdoor Play |
| Monday | 11:30 - 12:00 | Rest Time |
| Monday | 12:00 - 12:30 | Afternoon Tea |
| Monday | 12:30 - 1:00 | Free Play |
| Monday | 1:00 - 1:30 | Story Time |
| Monday | 1:30 - 2:00 | Circle Time |
| Monday | 2:00 - 2:30 | Registration |

Table: Schedule for September 2013 (week)

| Day | Time | Activity |
|---------|---------------|---------------|
| Tuesday | 8:30 - 9:00 | Registration |
| Tuesday | 9:00 - 9:30 | Circle Time |
| Tuesday | 9:30 - 10:00 | Story Time |
| Tuesday | 10:00 - 10:30 | Free Play |
| Tuesday | 10:30 - 11:00 | Snack Time |
| Tuesday | 11:00 - 11:30 | Outdoor Play |
| Tuesday | 11:30 - 12:00 | Rest Time |
| Tuesday | 12:00 - 12:30 | Afternoon Tea |
| Tuesday | 12:30 - 1:00 | Free Play |
| Tuesday | 1:00 - 1:30 | Story Time |
| Tuesday | 1:30 - 2:00 | Circle Time |
| Tuesday | 2:00 - 2:30 | Registration |

Transitional Objects

'At group times initially we asked the children to bring a umm, communications box of special things, pictures of family members and they have access to that when they are here....things that are important to them and we get to knowBut its worked well for the children that do bring it in'.

(Richard)

Transitions happen overtime

'I mean putting them into nursery I think is fantastic because it gets them ready for school'

(Louise)

....and can continue long after child has left

'There is one child that comes back still for me to do her hair in the morning before she goes to school and I feel that helped her a little bit with the transition to school because she comes in and tells me about what she did the day before and what she is going to do today'.

(Annie)

Supporting families

'Her grandparent as well will come to me if he has got any worries if anything has upset him so that's kind of helped him that that transition as well not just the child'.


(Annie)

The transition group - 'supporting the families as they go into the school'.

(Clare)


'The lovely thing about the children going to the local schools, we can still see them and the parents can come and ask for any advice. Often when I see them in the playground in the morning they might come and ask for a little bit of advice because it is all very new for them as well it can be a really difficult time you know.'

(Clare)



Partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers;

Parents and/or carers should be kept up-to-date with their child's progress and development. Practitioners should address any learning and development needs in partnership with parents and/or carers, and any relevant professionals.



'I don't know a lot of people are saying it might be because he is one of the youngest in the class Umm, a lot of it is I would say probably down to my mental health'.
(Louise)

How you learnt to support children/each other through a transition

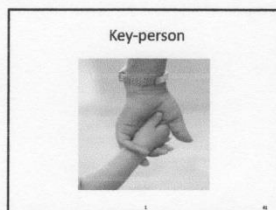
- Just mothers instinct really isn't. If you know, you just know when they sometimes need a cuddle or when they need something explaining (Samantha)
- From experience
- Personal theories
- Academic study
- Listening to children
- Policies
- From others
- Internet
- Constructing ways together

Personal experiences – Being with friends

'First day there was fifteen of us that went from here, which was quite nice a whole big group of us'.
(Lyn)

'There was a group of five or six of us and we stuck together the whole five years, so I can't remember there being any problems at all when I was there'.
(Sophie)

'It's not just the environment; it's also the people that are there and also their peer relationships. We will always make a real big point if they know another child that is coming from nursery or umm, and when we sort out who's in morning sessions and afternoon sessions'.
(Richard)



Wanting it to be different for children

'I can remember it being really difficult because Ia friend at preschool went to a different school. I was never really told that she was going to go to a different school, so my first day at big school she wasn't there and umm, I can remember feeling quite lonely'.
(Clare)

'...do lots of talking do lots of listening, provide resources whether they are photo books, going to school booksbeing there to listen to any questions'.
(Clare)

Parents recognise the importance of talking

I think just talking them through it doing activities on a calendar, building up to it. So you have count down and things like that.
(Janet)

Practitioners' Learning

'the manager that went through everything'
'having pedagogic support'
'you learn from each other as professionals'
'putting yourself in other peoples' shoes'
'it's just learning over the years, really, learning through settling in, talking to the parents'
'learning at college'
(Sophie, Annie, Lillie, Clare)

Liz Truss says:

'This distance between the early years and primary schools is a mistake. It would be quite wrong to think that under-5s should have one sort of pedagogy and over-5s a completely different one.'

http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/43816/13-04-14-early-years-policy-consultation

Free-flow play is not compulsory, but there is a belief across lots of nurseries that it is. I have seen too many chaotic settings, where children are running around. There's no sense of purpose.

(Liz Truss)

Changes in expectations/curriculum

'So that has been really different for them, not coming in and just running all over, it's been a big thing so I am introducing more structure they are getting lot's and lot's better, they are really good now, they you know, I still make sure because they still learn really well through their play. Umm, so I still make sure that they still have lots of time to indulge in their interest but at the same time introducing that little bit more structure to prepare them.'

(Phylis)

'It is a transitional year in the sense that it will be more, it will be closer to year one provision.'

(Richard)

'To be one hundred per cent honest, last year there was very limited things for transition into year one. Umm, I know within the school there was a project, of almost movement towards changing umm, key stage one to build more on foundation stage'

(Richard)

'Fun learning workshop in that you go in just one day a week with your child and we did different activities. So we did literacy and like numeracy and shapes and stuff like that, I think it was four weeks, four weeks' worth.'

(Janet)

Transitions can be exciting and positive (Brooker, 2008). Many children are excited at the prospects of starting big school and becoming a school child.

'Yeah he couldn't wait to go to school he really couldn't he was so excited.'

(Louise)

Transition to school affords opportunities for communities to celebrate children and families and to demonstrate the value of early education as well as respect for those involved in this endeavour. The transition to school is an opportunity to strengthen the community identity of schools and prior-to-school settings and the place of these institutions within communities.

(Charles Sturt University 2011, Transition To School Position Statement)

Appendix 4: Symposium PowerPoint

04/06/2015

DISCOVER WITH PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Are we Ready?

Karen Wickett – 18th November 2013

A successful transition to school is a key determinant in a child's later academic achievement.

(Eroder, 2008; Dunlop & Tallan, 2007; Grimaldi & Nisbet, 2009; Educational Transitions and Change (ETC) Research Group, 2011).

Research questions

1. What are parents', EY practitioners' and teachers' beliefs, experiences and understanding of the transition to school?
2. What happens when they share these understandings and beliefs?

Gathering Data -

Two case studies

Parents, EY practitioners and teachers

- Individual interviews (case study 1)
- Focus groups
- Meeting place

A 'meeting place'

'...a meeting place in the physical and also social, cultural and political sense of the word. A forum or site for meeting and relating, where children and adults meet and commit to something, where they can dialogue, listen and discuss, in order to share meanings'.

(Associação Mestres Rosa Senaut, 2005: 10)

Research Question 1

What are parents', EY practitioners' and teachers' beliefs, experiences and understanding of the transition to school?

Umm, I think it's completely individual, and I think the environment that the school provides has to be adaptableI can't sit here and give you a list of ten things children need to be able to do from the day they start school.

(Teacher)

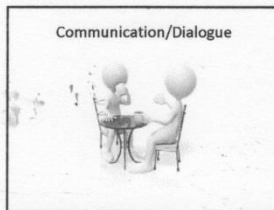
Formal Transition Systems

- Home visits
- Key person approach
- Setting in visits
- Sharing information
- Transitional objects -
- Transition group
- School visits
- Parent meetings
- Setting in visits
- Home PLDD – language
- School Entry Plans
- Line management
- Parent workshops
- Talking to teachers, about what to do next at home
- Reading books about children starting school
- Taster days
- Picture books of school environment
- Transfer form – learning journeys
- Two year old developmental check
- Applications to schools

Informal ways of supporting transition

- Talking and explaining
- Using routines
- Listening
- Friendships
- Flexible systems
- Recognising uniqueness of children/families
- Being given control
- Decision making
- Reflecting home knowledge into the setting
- Understanding transitions are processes
- Emphasising the positives of the transition
- Being consistent
- Making it fun

- Just mothers instinct really isn't it you know, you just know when they sometimes need a cuddle or when they need something explaining (Samantha)
- From experience
- Personal theories
- Academic study
- Listening to children
- Policies
- From others – friends, colleagues
- Internet
- Constructing ways together



See that's why I can't fault this school. They are doing so much to prepare the children. We have got four weeks of Wednesdays going in with the children. Today is a coffee afternoon. Gradually they'll introduce the teacher. They do the home visits. They do the parent classes once they start and the do seem, and because of my child's medical problems I've had quite a few meetings already with the teachers. So I can put my worries across. (Lynne)

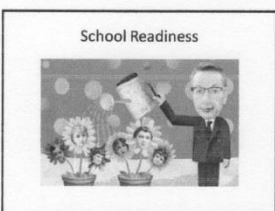
Starting Points of Dialogue - data

'Jacob's really behind, so I have been told by statistics of what is expected of a child of this age.....he can't count from one to ten, although he can now because we have taught him you know in the last two weeks. Umm, he can't write his own name, he can't write any letters, hardly any letters. Umm, a lot of things. He is behind on, yeah but it did make me feel really bad.' (Louise)

'We set up meetings to discuss the two year old check with the parents just because it's got to be sort of formalised. They have to go through it all. The conversation often turns to other things... ..gave that time for a chat, that I don't honestly think she would have accessed if I'd said shall we go and have a chat. If it was, if there was no aim'. (Lily)

Expectation of policy

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life. (OfE, 2012, p.2)



School Readiness

'It's all about figures and being so many can do this, that's all they are interested in.....it's all you know they can tick a box; they say right child A can write their name tick. Child A can recognise their name. Child A can recognise numbers'. 'Whereas, you know you can't tick a box for this child is confident, this child feels happy in themselves'. (Simon and Liam)

Politicians' beliefs about the skills needed to be school ready

'Teachers report to me that a growing number of children cannot form letters or even hold a pencil. Many cannot sit and listen. Many can scarcely communicate orally, let alone frame a question' (Hogg, M. 2011)

'We want children to learn to listen to a teacher, learn to respect an instruction, so that they are ready for school'. (Hogg, L. 2013)

Challenge

....if your child is born on September the first or if they are born on August the 31st there is a massive difference between their level of ability....when they go to school. Because the other child has had eleven months longer learning.

(Liam)

Learn to respect they should do that any way respect their adults not just because they are a teacher

(Poppy)

But also adults respect the child it is two way

(Heidi)

We are not here to prepare the children for school, were here to give them the tools for them then to learn at school.

(Mary)

Being able to write their name and being able to recognise their name, being able to recognise the same numbers in sequence, that kind of skills. Umm, and while I think they are useful, I think at, at the start it needs to be more about things like resilience. I think the skills that they need are more about, their learning and I think it is those dispositions and attitudes that they need to take with them that umm, we need to support them to be able to be resilient and obviously it is going to be such a change for them I think it's more about looking after their well being and just making sure that they are confident.

(Lily)

'Of course, maths, language and science are important. But if we only looked and listened, ...children were using maths all the time. We prefer to test and diagnose at a distance rather than participate to better understanding what children are doing, for example through pedagogical documentation'.

(Whitby, 2013, p88)

Social constructivist

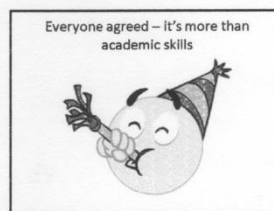
'This perspective sees readiness in social and cultural terms which is fluid and is defined in the social situation the child is situated. A child maybe school ready in one setting but not another area.'

(Meeah, 1999)

Parents, practitioners and teachers believe

- **Personal skills** - cut her food up, basic life skills, dressing themselves and undressing, put their own shoes on, take themselves off to the toilet
- **Social skills** - fit in, knowing how to behave in public or even in the setting, being way from a parent, listening and engaging with others, make friends, communicate their needs, get to know the teachers

- **Emotional development** - well-being, resilience, confidence, self management
- **Attitudes to learning** - open to possibilities of learning, positive disposition for learning, a wish to explore and investigate
- **Academic skills** - write letters, being able to sit down and pay attention and concentrate, name recognition, count to 10, able to communicate



About the foundations of being a person not just making them into an academic person
(Sarah)

Alternative trajectories for children's learning

- Ready for school
- Ready for life

Early education should serve objectives of public education and provide children with 'readiness' for school skills.

Early Years provision aims to support families and the broad developmental needs of young children, so preparing children for life.

(OECD, 2006 p.59)

Liz Truss says:

'This distance between the early years and primary schools is a mistake. It would be quite wrong to think that under-5s should have one sort of pedagogy and over-5s a completely different one.'

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444444/liz-truss-early-years-policy.pdf

Opportunities for systems and sectors to define transition approaches and to consider constructive alignment of curriculum and pedagogies across educational contexts

Education 2030: Learning to Transform. Report of the High Level Panel of Experts. 2015. www.un.org/education/2030

Umm I think they learn more through play

Yeah

Yeah

I think if you can combine the two that would be ideal. Maybe writing in the mud

Yes

Yeah or in sand

Write with mud

Yeah

Finger painting and stuff

Umm - Make some stuff

If you are making a mud pile, why not write a recipe alongside?

So what are we writing and putting in the recipe?

Just develop the activities that they really enjoy doing

Yeah that's right make it interesting

(Emma, Rosie, Beth, Louise)

'I think more nursery should teach more about forming letters and things and developing concentration....Up until they are about seven they don't want to sit down and listen to a lesson'

(Rosie)

You can involve play and assess it. Listening to children you can tick that stuff off.
(Poppy)

Since I have been here more EY focus pushing up the school
(Heidi)

Using the classroom as a learning tool not just a classroom
(Poppy)

Research Question 2

- What happens when they share these understandings and beliefs?

An Opportunity to Listen

People talk about children coming that aren't independently going to the toilet. That can be logistically quite difficult. Umm, but I haven't had a year yet where I haven't had a reception child come who, you needs support in that kind of self care. So I wouldn't say that children need to be able to do that before they come to school.
(Teacher)

I have never heard that point of view. I always assumed that every reception class teacher didn't want to spend time taking children to the toilet ...because they had other things that needed to be done. I didn't realise that that some accepted that children wouldn't be able to do that.
(Father)

Who should be ready?

- Children's readiness can be strengthened through supporting parents' engagement with their child's learning and education
- Schools'/settings readiness can be monitored and practical strategies introduced to ensure successful transitions
- Readiness is also a community responsibility, for ensuring that the child's right to more equitable and excellent services is realised

'I think I listening to all this and doing this. It's also making me think that the child being ready is almost the least important thing. Because it's a lot of pressure to put on the child to be ready for a certain stage at a certain date. Whereas, it should be more important that we are all ready to support the child through the continuation of their, of their learning'.
(Liam)

Consider :

- How do you define school readiness ?
- How do/can you measure school readiness?
- the transition to year 1

'I am kind of dreading next year because you say it is more structured next year.... I am not sure my son is going to cope'. (Louise)

Moss and Dalhberg

Construct a shared understanding

- of the child,
- Learning and teaching
- your role
- the purpose of education

Transition to school affords opportunities for communities to celebrate children and families and to demonstrate the value of early education as well as respect for those involved in this endeavour. The transition to school is an opportunity to strengthen the community identity of schools and prior-to-school settings and the place of these institutions within communities.

(Charles Sturt University 2011, Transition To School Position Statement)

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