CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Children commencing their first year of schooling face a situation that is fundamentally different from their preschool and home experience in terms of the curriculum, the setting and the people involved. These differences may affect the way they adjust to the school with possible negative results in their learning. Research suggests that children's emotional and social wellbeing are key ingredients in how well children settle into school (Fabian, 2000).

In pursuit of such an understanding, this study describes the policy position of government for the transition from the Reception Year to school, and documents the ways in which teachers and parents understand the transition of children. With the aid of a Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Gresham & Elliott, 1990), the main domains imperative for making good adjustments to a new environment, i.e. social and emotional competence and adaptive behaviour and academic competence, are measured to gauge the degree to which children have been successful in making the adjustment. The study also documents transition strategies from the perspective of children and how they deal with such challenges.

1.2 RATIONALE

The preschool phase has for decades been a neglected area of education. The movement for establishing the early childhood development (ECD) sector in South Africa can be traced back to the early 1940s. The provision of early childhood services had all along been based on racial lines until the dawn of the democratic era

in 1994. The white sector of the country enjoyed full subsidisation of their preschools, and continued to enjoy high-level training of preschool teachers whilst these opportunities were denied the black population of the country. From the 1950s until the early 1970s there was no preschool provision in the black sector of the country, according to the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI, 1992).

The preschool movement for the black sector of the community was only revived in the early 1970s by the Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) and community movements, which felt the need to bridge the gap between the child's transition from home into school. The De Lange Commission of the 1980s, which was tasked with the responsibility of looking into ways of improving the education system countrywide, was instrumental in highlighting the importance of preschool education for disadvantaged communities in improving performance in formal schooling. The commission recommended the establishment of a bridging class to prepare children for school, but under the pretext of the high costs involved, it was declined by the apartheid government. NEPI investigated the ECD provision in the country and came to the conclusion that in order to promote school readiness and to cut the costs of funding the early childhood sector the government should introduce a bridging class (Reception or Grade R) in which children would be prepared to enter the school sector ready to learn (NEPI, 1992). The recommendation by NEPI influenced later developments in the early childhood education sector and led to the development of the White Paper No. 5 on Early Childhood Education of 2001.

The White Paper No. 5 on Early Childhood Education (2001a), a legislative work that promulgated the establishment of Grade R with a national curriculum, embraced the findings of the Nationwide Audit of ECD Provisioning in South Africa (2001b) when it admitted that the preschool phase was inundated with personnel without any formal training in preschool teaching (Department of Education, 2001b). The preschool phase of teacher training was never the responsibility of the previous government, hence preschools had to rely on NGO and community trained personnel and their training itself cascaded in intensity and effectiveness according to how well funded

each of these structures were. Without adequate funding, the NGO's struggled to provide high quality training programmes that was needed by ECD personnel.

Within this context, the aim of this study was to examine policy documents as well as ascertain the perceptions and understandings about transition to school policies and procedures held by key stakeholders. These stakeholders included government officials, NGO personnel, school staff as well as parents and children. The study also explored children's experiences of transition and their adjustment to Grade 1. In dealing with this, the study determined the extent to which Grade 1 teachers understood the Grade R curriculum and whether they viewed the two grades as a continuum of experiences for children. The perceived primary school teachers' awareness and the promotion of continuity in the curriculum and philosophies between their schools and the preschool centres was noted.

If children are to be successful throughout their school years, then they need to have a firm, stable and quality foundation. According to Aubrey, David, Godfrey, and Thompson (2002), high quality early childhood care and services contribute to young children's early learning and future academic outcomes, more so for the less advantaged. However, Clyde (1991) suggested that despite the early learning centres having a positive influence on children's future academic career, they can at the same time have a negative impact, especially if children experience many changes in alternate caregivers and settings, or where the child is exposed to poor-quality settings with a high adult-child ratio, and in which the caregivers lack a basic knowledge of child development. Clyde (1991) further elaborated that it is not uncommon to find children coming from home making better transitions to school than those coming from preschool. In South Africa, not all children attend preschool and not all schools have Grade R and concerns are raised about possible disadvantages to these children. However, children also benefit when they have strong parental encouragement and support for their learning (Senosi, 2004).

It is against the background of the factors identified above that my study was conceptualised-to find out how children negotiate these transitions from preschool or home into the primary school.

1.3   THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR ECD AND THE TRANSITION TO GRADE 1

The dawn of the new democracy in 1994 brought children's rights to the centre stage of South African politics for the first time. Children were guaranteed equal rights and this was enshrined in the country's Constitution. According to Section 29 (a) of the Bill of Rights, "everyone has the right to basic education": a statement that opened doors for the young children of this country to participate actively in the education provision that the country offered (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This state of affairs was embraced by all, and the Department of Education quickly responded by enacting legislations that were critical in entrenching and sustaining the rights of the child. White Paper No. 1 on Education and Training of 1996 paved the way for the introduction of the Interim Policy of Early Childhood Development of 1996, which gave rise to the launching of the three-year National Reception Year Pilot Project of 1997. This project's main concern was for the provision of a national system of one year's public provisioning of early childhood development (ECD), namely the Reception Year (Grade R) for five- and six-year-olds (White Paper No.1 on Education and Training, 1995). It was envisaged that Grade R programmes would provide adequate opportunities for children to develop to their fullest potential, especially those children who lived in poverty (Department of Education, 2001a). The long-term goal of the government is that by 2010 all children that enter Grade 1 should have participated in an accredited Reception Year programme.

Prior to 1994, the NGOs, played an important role in establishing and sustaining the provision of ECD in South Africa in the black sector of the population in particular. In introducing Grade R, it was therefore imperative that they continued to do so alongside community–based organisations like churches and women's organisations. The NGOs and community-based ECD service providers being non-profit

organisation were therefore appropriate to implement the lower-cost model and curriculum with the emphasis on high quality Reception Year Programmes for disadvantaged children promulgated by the Interim Policy on ECD (DOE, 1996).

There were two types of ECD service providers countrywide: public and private providers. Private providers consisted of community-funded sites subsidised by parents' fees and the community as a whole, and independent schools; these constitute the two largest groups of providers. They were largely fragmented, and there were variations in terms of provision and quality, and this prompted the government to streamline the provision and set up a common framework from which to work, hence the Pilot Project. All participating ECD providers had to undergo the process of accreditation of both resources and training organisation (Interim Policy on ECD: DOE, 1996) before they could eventually participate in the project.

The National Pilot Project as a precursor of White Paper No. 5 on ECD largely influenced the direction ECD education provision was to take. Although some provinces had difficulties in implementing the project, there were nevertheless good reports from others, as the implementation went on as planned. For the first time in the history of the country, ECD was publicly brought to the fore, acknowledged and entrenched by the passing of White Paper No. 5 on ECD. For the first time provision of ECD (Grade R) was streamlined and a coherent framework in which it was to be offered was determined (DOE, 2001a). The National Curriculum for all Grade Rs came into the picture and was responsible for bringing about some form of coherence in education provision for all children countrywide. According to White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a), the purpose of this policy is to:

- eradicate the cycle of poverty, poor adjustment to school, increased grade repetition and the school dropout rate;

- bridge the curricular differences and disparities between formal education and an informal education systems; and

- maintain the principle of continuity in the knowledge of the children (DOE, 2001a: 3 - 4).

Grade R was made compulsory from the beginning of 2001 and by 2010 it is expected that all children in the country should have attended Grade R before making a transition to Grade 1. However, there is still a high number of children who move from home into primary schools without attending Grade R (DOE, 2001b). This partly is attributable to lack of funds by the parents to pay for the children's fees, as not all preschools receive the government subsidy to offer Grade R and to lack of adequately trained teachers who have qualifications recognised by DOE (DOE, 2001b).

The national policies have evoked resistance and criticism from many quarters in various fields of knowledge as they were seen as a form of prescriptiveness by the government. The most vociferous of these voices pointed to the lack of clarity and content of the new curriculum. As a result the quality and quantity of programmes in preschools for the age cohort 0-5 years designed to combat the problem of "maladjustment", or to prepare the child for formal education, differ from one provider to another as there are no benchmarks to define their format.

Most of the teachers responsible for Grade R have undergone retraining in the Revised National Curriculum Statement that became compulsory from the beginning of 2004. Despite aiming at some form of equity in the case of Grade R programmes, disparity in offering these programmes persists as the training undergone by the teachers differs from one area to another. The qualifications of these practitioners cannot go unnoticed as they also have some bearing on their facilitation in the classroom. To make matters worse the Nationwide Audit of ECD Provisioning in South Africa (2001b) revealed that less than 26% of teachers in the preschool area have qualifications recognised by the Department of Education. This means that a massive 74% do not possess the necessary skills and knowledge and are therefore not qualified to teach in the preschools.

Early Childhood Education in the South African context is defined as a phase starting from birth to age nine (0-9 yrs) encompassing both the pre-primary and the primary sector. The two phases are distinct from one another as regards the "curriculum, teaching methodologies, environment and surroundings, role of parents and what is expected of children" (Yeboah, 2002:1). Children in South Africa can only be admitted into formal learning in the year in which they turn seven years, to ensure that they are ready to make the transition (DOE, 1996). Concerns are raised about the reliability of age as the sole determinant of school readiness and the ability to make smooth transitions (Richardson, 1997). According to research age is not necessarily the best predictor of developmental level, but a number of factors working together are responsible for school readiness (Graue, 1993 in Dockett and Perry, 2002b).

The disparities that exist in the preschool provisioning in the country, a legacy of the past apartheid policies, have prompted me to find out if there are any significant impacts preschools have had on children who attend them in a developing context.

In the light of the above, I wanted to find out how the schools operate within these legislative frameworks, and the significance of the legislation for the curriculum and policies governing the schools.

The experiences of children coming from a disadvantaged socio-economic background who attended preschool and those coming from home was brought to the fore.

The two provinces included in this study, have children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds, they however have experienced ECD in different settings. ECD in Province A was largely in the hands of NGOs and community structures, whereas in Province B the then homeland government had taken over the training of teachers and the subsidisation of ECD centres.

1.4   THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THIS STUDY

The discussion below outlines the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The child's transition does not happen in a vacuum; there are a number of variables such as the home, preschool and school and the wider community that impact on how these transitions have to be traversed. Wong Ngai Chun (2003) likens this transition movement to an 'ecological shift', from home or small preschool to the new and more competitive environment of primary school. While the transition is experienced by children, they have little opportunity to influence and determine the direction they have to take. Transitions are not only determined by societal influences but are also compelled by the reorganisation of the biological and psychological structure of children. Transition is a "long-term process that results in qualitative reorganisation of both inner life and external behaviours" (Cowan & Hetherington, 1991:3).

This study cannot be understood in terms of one theoretical perspective, but it is a multidimensional study involving various role players in different contexts. A number of theoretical perspectives are examined to give the study a comprehensive and global understanding of the influence of different role players in shaping and influencing the course of transitions. The conceptions governing this study are based on the following knowledge claims gleaned from the literature review on transitions:

- Transitions are ecological shifts influenced by the family, school, government and the wider community. They are therefore context-specific;

- Transitions can only be successful if a harmonious relationship exists between the role players influencing the course the child has to navigate (Dockett & Perry, 2001a);

- Transitions are normally accompanied by stress as the child sets out on the route of reorganising his inner life and external behaviours to suit the new context (Fabian, 2000);

- Transitions are the rites of passage experienced and influenced by cultural expectations (Fabian, 2000).

1.4.1 Transitions as influenced by variables in environment

The transition of children from Grade R or home to primary school is said to be influenced and shaped by social institutions such as families, school, the government and the wider community (Dunlop, 2003). The transitions made by children are often different from those made by adults. It is said that transitions involving parents are characterised by the adults themselves shaping the route and the direction in which these transitions will take place. On the other hand, transitions for children are being determined for them without actually involving them in the decision-making process (Prout & James, 1997). The involvement of social institutions is quite significant in influencing and shaping the transition of children. The relationship between the institutions, the synergy and the synchronisation of their activities is imperative in making transitions successful.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory describes and maps the various contexts and levels of settings that influence children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner views transitions in a holistic manner as not just something happening to the child but also happening to those who are involved in shaping them. There are also interrelationships amongst the different factors that influence the course or direction these transitions will take. These interrelationships can result in successful or flawed transitions. This passage of transition and the adjustment of the child to school are determined largely by the relationships the child has with family, teachers, peers and the community and will differ from one cultural group to the other, bringing in variety and disparity in how transitions are made over time and space. The child cannot make the transitions alone, as transitions affect not only the child but also the adults who support him to make them easy and successful. This transition is tantamount to a socialisation process, whereby the child constructs his/her own

knowledge and skills that will eventually enable him/her to make successful adaptation (Elliott, 1995).

The passage the child has to travel from preschool to primary school is imbued with emotional and social adjustments and the various variables and adjustments until the child has finally being incorporated into the new school culture. Cowan & Hetherington (1991) state that transitions affect the reorganisation of both the inner life and external behaviours. Fabian (2000) and Dockett and Perry (2003) explain the impact on this "inner life" of the child as he/she transits from home/preschool to primary school, i.e. moving away from preschool, separating from parents, and finally becoming incorporated into the new school and accepting and adopting the culture of the new school. It is the social and emotional competences which will determine whether the child will make a success of adapting to his new school situation. The values, attitudes and culture of the child and of the school affect and shape the way the child is going to adapt to the new school. This implies that there needs to be some continuity between the home and the school and between the preschool and the school. The child needs to experience the school as a familiar place, and not as a strange place in which she/he becomes lost.

The scope of this study is to investigate and document how schools, children and parents deal with transitions and what role the government plays in terms of policies that deal with easing the tension that may be brought about by transiting from an informal education setting to a formal school setting.

A theoretical framework that emphasises the complex and interactive nature of transitions as expounded above was used to inform the design of this study and understand the analysis of data and the conclusions drawn from the analysis.

1.5 TRANSITION EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS

1.5.1 Research of transitions to primary schools

The literature abounds with discussions about the experiences of the key players in children's transitions. There are some similarities and differences in how the key players experience transitions (Dunlop, 2002; Early, Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Despite these differences in particular relating to age and the influence of preschools on learning there seems to be a common factor amongst all role players, namely that their experiences are underlined by considerable amounts of emotion. The transition process has been experienced by participants as traumatic, stressful and at the same time challenging (Yeboah, 2002). These emotional experiences influence the way they perceive their contribution as positive or negative, curtailed to some extent by policies governing the schools, which takes into consideration the importance of the role played by those who have to facilitate them. The experiences of children, teachers and parents in the transition experiences of children are delineated.

1.5.2 Children's experiences of transitions

Children in studies in developed countries expressed their anxiety and apprehension about their entry into school and what the whole process means to them (Griebel & Niesel, 2002; Peters, 2000; Clarke & Sharpe, 2003). Restrictions imposed by the primary school routine were disliked by children who were part of the German study. They disliked the fact that they could not go and play when they wanted to. Play was restricted to break times and the other time was for serious work (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Griebel & Niesel, 2002). Children voiced their dislike of the school, as it was associated with a lot of work and homework, and their preference for preschools since they were allowed to move around and were not restricted to their desks.

Children have claimed that the lack of continuity between kindergarten and primary school was unsettling for them. They noted that in primary school there was less

freedom of choice compared with their kindergarten experiences. They also felt insecure and nervous about going to school (Peters, 2000; Broström, 2002 & Einarsdóttir, 2003). These studies reveal that children perceive going to primary school as stressful due to discontinuity between the preschool and the primary school. While some children were wary of discontinuities between the preschool and primary school, there were some children who delighted to learn new things in a new environment, and saw this opportunity as a challenge rather than a threat. They viewed discontinuity as a challenge for them to prepare themselves well for the new eventuality (Dockett & Perry, 2002b). Children therefore emphasised that knowing school rules would put them on favourable platform in conforming to the school's rules and regulations.

Discontinuities in the physical structure of the schools were noted by children. When children talked about primary school, they tended to talk about features in primary schools that differed from those at preschools. The school was perceived as "big school" where actual learning was to take place. Due to the constructive approach being used in preschools, most of the children felt that they had taught themselves everything they knew in preschools whereas in the primary schools they were going to be taught how to read and write-seemingly more difficult skills to learn than those learnt in preschools. These ideas about the school being a serious place of work seem to have emanated from older siblings and parents (Broström 1999 cited in Einarsdóttir, 2003). Children in the Danish study had a vivid and clear image of what a primary school was, and illuminated the differences between the primary school and the pre-primary school. Children seemed to have accepted the fact that they had to undergo change as they were moving from a preschool to a primary school.

Making friends and being in their company was a significant aspect about liking school and making good adjustments to school, a fact mentioned in a number of transition studies (Margetts, 1999; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Peters, 2000).

Active and involved parents, neighbourhood and community-based organisations as well as teachers all have an important role to play in supporting the school's mission. Schools therefore need to understand what parents value, want and need. Creating a partnership between school and community is an important area of many, if not most, effective school reform efforts. Effective school-community partnerships do make a difference in improving educational quality, academic outcomes, and effective reform efforts (Graue, 1999).

1.5.3 Children's adjustment to school

Children's adjustment to school has been identified through observation of children in and outside the classroom, as they interact with the teacher and with other children and through the use of rating scales (Kienig, 2002; Margetts, 2003). Adjustment is the ability of children to learn optimally in the classroom by being emotionally and socially developed to cope with classroom activities.

In her study on the social adjustment of children of three years and six years old with the aid of Schaefer and Aaronson's Classroom Behaviour Inventory Preschool to Primary school Scale (CBI), Kienig (2002) found more disturbances in social relationships and emotional disturbance amongst three-year-old than among six-year-old children. She concluded that younger children experience more difficulty in adjusting into a new environment than older children.

Margetts (2003), using the Social Skills Rating System with 212 Melbourne primary school children, found a correlation between the parents' status of employment, socio-economic status, children's gender and adjustment to the first year of school. Children whose parents had full-time employment positions had better self-control skills than those from an unemployed home background. Girls had higher levels of adjustment than boys, particularly in relation to social skills and the absence of problem behaviours. Children whose home language was not English also had difficulty in adjusting to school.

While Kienig (2002) related age to good adjustments, she showed that age contributes to increased adjustment skills. Margetts, however, found that age is a good predictor of academic competence and not socio-emotional competence. Age as a criterion for school is crucial and needs to be investigated in another study to determine how relevant it is in the adjustment of children.

1.5.4 Teachers' views

The primary school and the preschool together with the home are the three main contexts that influence children's adaptation to school life. The child who has a supportive relationship with the three is most likely to make a smooth transition (Cleave, Jowett & Bate, 1982; Ramey & Ramey, 1994; Dockett & Perry, 2001a). There is, however, a remarkable difference in how preschool teachers view their work in comparison with the views of primary schoolteachers. Preschool teachers have always employed play-based methods of teaching and learning whereas primary schools are content-oriented and activities are teacher-directed instead of being learner-directed. These differences are echoed by teachers themselves, who feel that preschool is a period of innocent playing and primary school is the beginning of serious times. These differences seem to have been internalised by children who now seem to view starting primary school as a turning point in their lives (Einarsdóttir, 2003).

Teachers' views on transitions differ according to the context in which they teach and what underpins their role and work. Primary school teachers' conception of learning is associated with reading and writing. Preschool teachers, on the other hand, view their work as part of the continuity of learning across preschool and primary school. According to them, learning starts right from preschool with basic skills such as recognition of letters, shapes and colours, which are basic and foundational to the reading and writing processes (Cleave *et al.*, 1982; Einarsdóttir, 2003). In a pilot training on the adjustment of children from preschool to primary school in Poland

teachers were said to perceive the subject of continuity as not related to the cooperation between preschool and benefiting children but rather 'as related to the process of adaptation and its associated difficulties" (Ogrodzińska, 2006: 43). The tension between the preschool and primary school continued as a result of the common belief that the real education starts at primary school. These views of the preschool and the primary school teachers are the result of historical differences in traditions and the philosophies of the two institutions (Neuman, 2002).

Preschool teachers have been noted to be apprehensive of closer ties with the school. They are worried that such a relationship can result in preschools becoming formal, hence losing their focus of developing pre-skills for literacy and mathematics, which are imperative as a foundation for formal learning (Broström, 2002).

Broström (2002) reported that primary school teachers had shown no interest in what preschool teachers were doing, and even information documents children brought from preschool were disregarded as the teachers felt that they were of no use. Children were treated as though they had no background skills or knowledge to bring to the primary schools. Despite teachers acknowledging the importance of the biographical information brought by parents, they did not think that they too (parents) have much to offer as they are the only ones in possession of specialized knowledge regarding children (Seifert, 1992). This attitude by teachers led to parents feeling unwanted by the teachers, who have kept them at a distance. Parents felt that if they were taken serious by the schools this would increase their self-confidence and that teaching can become more responsive to the needs of children as individuals (Seifert, 1992). According to Ogrodzińska, (2006) teachers also lacked the skills necessary for cooperation with parents and are even said to be more reluctant to do so.

A number of studies have identified strategies recommended for supporting children's adjustment to school (Cleave *et al.*, 1982; Taal, 2000; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2001). These strategies include:

- Pre-entry visits to the schools before the child is admitted into the school should be promoted and encouraged.

- Forming of new relationships between the teacher and the child and between the child and other peers.

- Explaining unfamiliar sights, sounds and events; showing children around the school.

- Encouraging and promoting cooperation between parents and teachers and creating opportunities for the exchange of information which is imperative in helping the child to succeed.

Parents in studies conducted seem to be uncomfortable with the relationship between themselves and the primary schools whereas in the preschool this type of problem seems nonexistent (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003).

The parent involvement and parent-teacher relationship are explored to find out the extent to which they contribute towards smooth transition. The role of all these factors in the context of this research is explored, to determine to what extent they are important in understanding transitions.

1.5.5 Parental experiences of transitions

Parents as the primary educators of children are very important in the children's transitions to primary school. Parents are said to be viewing transitions with trepidation, so that they have either avoided or played down the subject of transition. Parents have been found to worry about leaving their children in the care of teachers and to express scepticism and concern. (Cleave at al, 1982; Dalli, 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 2002).

The following comments outline how parents felt about primary schools and preschools:

- Parents felt unsure about dealing with teachers. They felt that the school kept them at arm's length and that not enough contact was evident between themselves and the teachers. Parents felt that boundaries in the primary schools were more rigid and remote than in preschools. There was a subtle, reproachable feeling between the staff and the parents, which made contact between them impossible (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003);

- Parents also expressed that they were confident with the preschool practitioners and the curriculum, but could not say the same with regard to primary schools (Dunlop, 2002). Informal contact prevalent in preschools barely survived in primary schools, as these were replaced by more formal appointments which were fewer in number. This limited the teachers' ability to get to know the children as individuals as was the case in preschools;

- Some parents however claimed that their children when entering school gained some independence which changed their previous role as parents as children transited to a position as a 'big school child'. This made them gain a new parental identity as the parents of a school going child (Griebel & Niesel, 2002).

1.6   KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research project undertaken was aimed at documenting the transition of children from home or preschool into Grade 1. The study used an interpretive paradigm to understand how transitions are negotiated by children. This study used different lenses in understanding transitions.

This study was framed by the following research questions;

- What are the official policy provisions for learner transitions from preschool to Grade 1 in South Africa?

- To what extent is there alignment or discrepancy between government policy for transition and the experiences of schools with respect to transition strategies for Grade 1 learners?

- What are the transition strategies deployed by the schools and home for Grade 1 learners?

- Is there the alignment of Grade R and Grade 1 curricula? What is the understanding of schools of the Grade R curriculum as a continuum of practices, knowledge and skills in Grade 1?

- How do teachers, parents and children understand and articulate transition strategies encountered by Grade 1 learners?

- What is the level/degree of adjustment shown by children as they enter Grade 1?

These questions are discussed in detail in Chapters Four, Five and Six where the process of the study is set out and the responses are analysed and interpreted.

The data generated by these questions were instrumental in understanding the process, strategies and the understanding of each of the key role players' responsibility in the transitions of children.

1.7   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study cannot be described exclusively as either qualitative or quantitative. It uses a mix of research strategies to collect and analyse data. The research strategies employed were divided into the following phases:

- **Phase 1 – The government's policy position on transition**

Official policy provision for transition was first examined by interrogating government policies such as White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a) and the RNCS (2002). Interviewing government and NGO officials was another imperative for understanding the government's position on transition.

- **Phase 2 – The school context for transitions**

It was considered important to understand in-house school and home transitions strategies and how effective they were in smoothing the child's transition from home/preschool into the Grade 1 class. A case study approach was used to identify the perspectives of school principals, teachers, parents and children. This was crucial in understanding the variables at play that influence children as they transit from home to school. The interviews brought to the fore any strategies used by the schools and the home in facilitating the children's movement into Grade 1.

Twelve focus children were identified for observation purposes on how they interact with one another and the teacher in the classroom. An interview was conducted with the children who were part of the case study. Children's ability to make adjustments were rated using the SSRS scale to determine their social and behavioural skills in adapting to a new environment, and how they fared in their academic competence as compared to other children in the class.

1.8 SAMPLING

Purposeful sampling was used in choosing the unit of analysis of the study, viz. the Grade 1 children who went through Grade R and those who did not. Twelve children were chosen in consultation with their teachers as to their adaptation knowledge and competency in the Grade 1 class. Detailed profiles based on their learning records starting from preschool education where applicable, their family and educational

backgrounds, their assessment records and their class-observed performances and interaction with other children were drawn. The twelve children were divided into two equal groups. They were based in two separate schools and two separate classrooms. The objective was that three children in each classroom should have a preschool background and the other three should be without a preschool background. The profiles of these children contributed to understanding their background and how it affected their present conditions.

1.9   CONTEXT OF STUDY

Case studies of two schools in two different provinces with the same socio-economic background were chosen as sites for the research study. A random selection was made from a list provided by the district officials, after extensive discussions with the officials as to the type of schools deemed suitable for such a study. The research investigated the transition strategies deployed by each of the two schools in terms of what informed the strategy and how these strategies are being used in supporting transition of children into Grade 1- hence the decision to select schools from the same socio-economic background. Both schools had an intake of children with preschool background and without. The two schools were chosen in order to make an in-depth study of transition strategies employed by both schools as to their effectiveness in helping children perceive transition as positive experience.

Grade R is now compulsory for all children, but there are still children who go to school without having been to Grade R. It is not surprising to find unqualified and under-qualified teachers who teach Grade R classes. How much do these teachers understand of the transition strategies and how to implement them? Focus group interviews were used to find the answer by asking teachers about the strategies they implemented in order to ease children's transition into formal schools.

A case study of two schools in two provinces was carried out. Twelve children were the focus of the case studies. The study focused on transition experiences of children in the school situation who went through Grade R/preschool and those who did not.

The objective was to determine the kind of transition strategies they went through (preschool and home) and how effective the strategies were in the adjustment of children in Grade 1. Six of these children were in one school with three of them without a preschool/Grade R background and three with a preschool/Grade R background. An observation of these children was conducted in class by their class teacher with the assistance of the researcher and the observation recorded on the SSRS instrument. This instrument provides a broad, multi-rater assessment of learners' social and emotional behaviours that can affect their whole adjustment to a grade, with good or grave consequences for the academic performance. This is a standardised, norm-referenced scale that has been used on more than 4000 American children with valid and reliable results. In addition to measuring social skills the SSRS also measures academic competence. The SSRS makes provision for parents to record their child's social and behavioural competence. This SSRS parent version also measures responsibility, which affects the child's readiness to tackle academic work independently (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

The research furthermore tried to define the transition strategies through focus group interviews with the parents and teachers to gain a common understanding of the issue at hand. This was coupled with interrogating available government and school policies that addressed transitional strategies and how they have been translated into practice.

1.10   DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

Structured interviews were used to gain information from government and NGO officials as to their understandings of transition policy provision. Policy documents were also interrogated to find if transition strategies are addressed by them, and how they are being implemented.

In-depth focus group interviews were conducted with teachers and parents. In this instance the focus groups consisted of all experienced teachers of Grade 1 at each school, and the parents of the twelve children in the study. The parent focus group

consisted of parents of children who have gone through preschool/Grade R and those who have not. The researcher used a semi-structured interview to gain the children's perspectives into transitions.

Data were gathered through observations of children by the teacher and the researcher in the class by using the SSRS instrument to record how well they have adjusted. The SSRS parent version was used by parents at home to record the frequency and importance of a social skill and problem behaviours in their children.

1.11 DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data from the focus groups, government officials, NGOs, policy documents, school principals and children were transcribed and emergent themes, topics and issues related to transition and the research questions identified. Non-verbal communication was also considered.

The possibility of correlation between the information from policy documents and the interviews and observation data was checked. This would confirm whether or not practice was informed by policy. The SSRS scores were recorded and analysed by comparing the teachers' scores with the parents within the province and across the provinces. The data were interpreted based on the theoretical framework of the study. In analysing data, the objective was to make conclusions that would support whether transition problems were redressed by the inception of Grade R or not.

1.12 LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

1.12.1 Limitations

This study was limited to:
- An investigation of government policy documents related to early childhood development.

- Strategies for children commencing Grade 1 as articulated and experienced by their principals, teachers, parents and children themselves.

1.12.2 Assumptions

The first assumption underpinning this study is that children's transition to school is influenced by a range of factors including government policy, school practices, family support and children themselves.

The second assumption is that while there is a range of government policy documents related to children starting school, knowledge and understanding of these documents by preschool and school personnel is limited. The school staff are generally unaware of the need for practices to support children's transition to school.

1.13 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS IN STUDY

Chapter One serves the purpose of orientating the reader to the aim of the research. It delineates the problem statement on which the research is based. The topic for this research is "A study of the transition of children from preschool and home contexts to Grade 1 in a developing country". Research questions formulated in this chapter shaped the research process. The rationale on which this study is founded is clearly explained.

Chapter Two focuses on the examination and study of literature based on transitions of children from preschool and home into the primary schools. The meaning given to transitions is examined from the perspective of all stakeholders involved in transitions. Factors promoting or impeding transitions are examined to find if they have any relevancy to the South African context. Criteria for a school-ready child are interrogated to find if they have any relevancy to the context of this study. Age as a criterion for school entrance is interrogated to find if it has any relevancy to readiness to learn in Grade 1.

The theoretical framework underpinning the study is highlighted in Chapter Three. Transition as used in the study is explicated and linked to various theories imperative for understanding this study. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is key to understanding this study. The adaptation of the ecological theory explicates and highlights issues such as variables at play in the transitions, the impact of transition on the child's socio-emotional development and the fact that transitions are experienced within certain structural and cultural contexts (Dunlop and Fabian, 2002; Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta, 1999; Fabian, 2000; Pianta and Cox, 1999 and Mayer, 2004). The importance of the interrelationship between these variables and how they affect the child's transition to school are explained. Life course theory as emanating from the ecological theory situates an individual within an economic context as the wealth of the context has a bearing on how transition is to be experienced.

Chapter Four deals with the empirical study that was undertaken. Relevant research methodology, including data collection strategies, is described intensively in this chapter. Data analysis strategies are also explained here. Limitations of the study are described clearly and how the researcher addressed some of them in accessing data needed to get a comprehensive understanding of transitions.

The data analysis is dealt with in two separate chapters according to the nature of the research. I first analyse the qualitative research, i.e. the interviews based on policy position on transitions to the school and school in-house and home strategies for facilitating transitions. The policies are interrogated as to their position on transitions. The relationship between government policies on transitions and the schools' in-house strategies is forged.

Chapter Six gives a detailed report on the results and findings per observation schedule, using the SSRS instrument. Results are analysed and interpreted:

- teachers' ratings of individual child in a province and across provinces;

- parents' ratings of individual child in a province and across provinces;
- comparison of children who went to preschool with those who did not.

Chapter Seven consists of the conclusions and findings drawn from the research, recommendations, and suggestions on the "best" way to promote smooth transitions between the preschool/home and the primary school. Variables existing in the school and the home front that had an effect on my study will be explained. The theoretical framework underpinning this study and its effect in driving the course of the study will be explained. A postscript analysis of the research course was conducted and my experiences both negative and positive have been explicated. Recommendations for further studies are discussed.

1.14   CONCLUSION

Chapter One has given a comprehensive overview of the trajectory of this study. The problem statement and the rationale behind this study have been clearly explained. Chapter Two consists of an in-depth analysis of the literature review of transitions. The strategies, the context and key players in transitions are highlighted, and what is regarded as key transition strategies compared with transition strategies in the developing context of my study.

CHAPTER TWO

**A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH
LITERATURE ON CHILDREN'S TRANSITIONS**

"*My writing is giant – The teacher scolds me…I can't read difficult words in
the storybook*" *(Clarke & Sharpe, 2003:19).*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter was to review the empirical literature on the subject of
transitions of children from home or preschool to the first year of formal schooling.
Chapter Two has specifically established what is already known about transitions to
the formal learning phase and the types of problems and processes associated with
such transitions. It has assessed the strengths and limitations of the knowledge base
on transition, and critically evaluated the relevance of this information to the
understanding of transitions. It has again identified gaps, silences and contradictions
in the published research on transitions.

I first traced through the literature the experiences of both preschool and primary
school teachers, and the kind of preparations they have made to advance the
transition of children from preschool to primary school. The children's emotional
change, their pedagogic knowledge, and skills imperative to know before going into
primary schools were fundamental to understanding factors underlying the transition
process and what it meant to each child involved in such a process. The involvement
and experiences of parents also formed an important part of this study, as parents are
the primary educators of children, and therefore play an important role in preparing
children for the ultimate entry into primary school. The literature review was
instrumental in bringing children's voices to the fore. It is very important to capture
children's voices and experiences, as they are the ones who make the transitions,

and not to view them only through adults' experiences but also from their own lens and perspective.

2.2 STATE OF RESEARCH ON TRANSITIONS TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

Transitions to school have been experienced differently by teachers, parents and learners in various national and social contexts (Dunlop, 2002; Early, Pianta & Cox, 1999). Different studies exist on the transition of children. Some of these are longitudinal studies ranging from birth or child care/preschool until the child commenced primary school (Kienig, 2002; Margetts, 2003). Others have only captured the child's experience as they enter the first Grade of formal education (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2001a; Fabian, 2002; Einarsdóttir, 2003). However, what seems to be common is that these studies have captured the socio-emotional and behavioural experiences of children, but there is very little focus on the academic competence of learners as they move from preschool to primary school. Children's academic self-concepts begin to take form in the early school years and influence the way children behave in academic situations as they move through school (Early *et al.*, 1999). Studies have further revealed that the transition process can be experienced by participants as traumatic, stressful and at the same time challenging (Broström, 2002; Clarke & Sharpe, 2003).

In research conducted by Griebel and Niesel (2002) on German children's coping in the kindergarten and preparation for formal schooling, it was found that most children expressed anxiety and apprehension as they entered school about what the whole process would mean to them. These sentiments were also captured in research conducted by Peters (2000) with young children in New Zealand when children expressed their feelings about being unsure and scared of starting school. These feelings were attributed to the discontinuity between the school and their previous experiences (Peters, 2000). The restrictions imposed by the primary school routine were disliked by children. They hated the fact that they could not go and play when they wanted to. Play was restricted to break times and the other time was for serious work. Clarke and Sharpe (2003) reported in a study of children in Singapore from

lower- and middle-class income homes, on their likes and dislikes at going to school, that they expressed their happiness with their preschools, but cited the academic work in the primary school as one of their worst experiences. When asked what they were not good at in their academic skills, they said "my writing is giant-the teacher scolds me…I can't read difficult words in the storybook" (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003:19). The primary school was associated with lots of work and homework whereas preschool was associated with toys and playing.

Peters (2000) made use of seven case studies of children and their families. These families were visited a number of times from the time the children were four until they turned eight. In all instances children claimed that lack of continuity between preschool and primary school was unsettling for them. They noted that in primary school there was less freedom for choice compared with their preschool experiences. Similar results were found in a study by Pramling and Williams-Graneld (1993) cited in Einarsdóttir (2003) on the experiences of seven-year-old children. Children in this study also expressed mixed feelings regarding their experiences of beginning primary school. A Danish study (Broström, 2003) of 565 children's expectations of primary school in 1995 reported insecurity and nervousness. A follow-up study in 1999 revealed the same tendencies (Broström, 2003). Children seemed to have formed conventional views about primary school. They viewed the school as a place where they were supposed to sit quietly and learn how to read and write. These studies revealed that children perceived going to primary school as stressful due to discontinuities between the activities and routines at preschool and the primary school. According to Broström (2003) cited in Einarsdóttir (2003), children who had participated in the Danish studies on transition to primary school worried about older children and the headmaster and said that they would miss the preschool friends and teachers. Children showed a fear of the unknown and did not want to part with what they were familiar with.

In the Starting School Research Project that investigated children's transition to school over a number of years in New South Wales, Australia, children emphasised

knowledge and understanding of school rules as imperative for them to operate effectively within the school context (Dockett & Perry, 2002b). Almost as strong as the focus on rules was the emphasis on disposition. For children, making friends and being in their company was the most significant fact about liking school and making good adjustments to school, a fact mentioned in a number of transition studies (Margetts, 1999; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Peters, 2000). It transpired that the children who initially reported scared or unsure feelings, also noted that these feelings passed quickly.

When children talked about primary school they tended to talk about features in primary schools that differed from those of preschools. Children in Italy expressed their concerns, fears or curiosities about going to school. They were aware of the physical differences between school and preschool. They mentioned things like individual seating at desks, no time available for afternoon nap, separate toilets according to gender, the availability of the gymnasium and that there would be more homework and less time for play (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005).

Although these discontinuities between the preschool and primary school were a source of distress for children, some children delighted to learn new things in a new environment, and saw this opportunity as a challenge rather than a threat. Children studied by Griebel and Niesel (2002) looked forward to starting school. Only a few seemed anxious about what lay ahead. These are the views echoed by children in Iceland when interviewed on their perception of primary school and whether they were anxious or looked forward to any particular thing. This study, conducted by Einarsdóttir (2003), concluded that children had a vivid and clear image of what a primary school was, and illuminated the differences between the primary school and the pre-primary school. Children seemed to have accepted the fact that they had to undergo change as they were moving from a preschool to a primary school.

Although most of the children in Einarsdóttir's study had been through preschool, they did not really regard it as a place of learning. They acknowledged that they had been

doing a lot in preschool, but believed that much more difficult work was awaiting them in primary school. Due to the constructive approach being used in preschools, most of the children felt that they had taught themselves everything they knew, whereas in the primary schools they were going to be taught how to read and write-seemingly more difficult skills to learn than what they had done in preschools. These ideas about the school being a serious place of work seem to have emanated from older siblings and parents and some had formed this idea from visits by the preschool to the primary school. Children had formed ideas that learning only took place when reading and writing from books (Einarsdóttir, 2003). This perception of preschools as against primary schools was influenced from their socio-cultural background which elevated the status of schools to that of learning institutions and relegated the preschool to a place of caring for and nurturing children (Einarsdóttir, 2003).

Children seem to grasp the gravity and the seriousness primary schools pose to them. However, from the studies conducted, children who had visited a primary school beforehand had been able to form their own conception of what a school is and what can be expected immediately they enter the "big school". (Einarsdóttir, 2003; Clarke & Sharpe, 2003). Children's view of school differs according to their exposure to the views of parents or older siblings, or whether they had visited a school before. The more contact there is between a preschool and a primary school, the better the child's conception of a school This is largely due to the continuity enforced by the two institutions in their curricula and philosophies, which is not prevalent in the majority of the schools (Clarke & Sharpe; 2003, Griebel & Niesel, 2003).

The research represented so far gives preference to children's voices alongside the voices of other role players (Griebel & Niesel, 2002; Dockett &Perry, 2001a). There are, however, three other agencies responsible for facilitating children's transition into primary school. These are the parents, the primary school and the preschool. Their contribution determines the degree to which transitions will be successful or not. The parents as the primary educators of children are responsible for the well-being of their

children and are therefore expected to support their children as they transit from home or preschool to a primary school. Children learn at home as well as at school. Educational practitioners and policy makers alike recognise that no single institution can create all of the conditions that students need in order to learn and develop in healthy, responsible, and caring ways. Educators, parents, and members of the community need to be effective and collaborative partners (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman and Cox, 1999).

Active and involved parents, neighbourhood and community-based organisations all have an important role to play in supporting the schools mission. Schools therefore need to understand what parents value, want and need. Creating a partnership between school and community is an important area of many, if not most, effective school reform efforts. Effective school-community partnerships do make a difference in improving educational quality, academic outcomes, and effective reform efforts (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman and Cox, 1999).

It is therefore imperative to address the three contexts namely the home, the community and the school in order to understand the transition process. Children as part of the three contexts mentioned will be dealt with in terms of adjustment and transition experiences.

2.2.1 Children's adjustment to school

Children's adjustment to school has positive consequences for their academic performance. According to Gresham and Elliott (1990), social and behavioural skills are essential for appropriate adjustment which impacts on the classroom and desirable academic performance.

Teacher ratings are a popular method for assessing how schoolchildren adjust to the new environment. Kienig (2002), in her study of transitions of children, employed a teacher rating scale to determine the level and degree to which children adjusted in a

new environment. Kienig found that the level of adjustments of children differed according to the ages of children under study. Her study of the social adjustment of children of three and six years old with the aid of Schaefer and Aaronson's Classroom Behaviour Inventory Preschool to Primary School Scale (CBI) found more disturbances in social relationships and emotional development amongst the three-year-old than among the six-year-old children. The study concluded that adjustment competence can only be realised as a result of the maturation of the nervous system and the acquisition of adaptive skills. The younger the child, the greater the difficulty encountered in adjusting to a new environment. It was confirmed that if younger children presented behavioural problems at the beginning of the preschool these tended to persist throughout the year to a greater extent than with children who had no disturbances.

Children who have experienced intense adjustment problems at entry into preschool have a tendency to behaviour problems at the beginning of the first primary school year, and in most cases these problems seemed to intensify (Kienig, 2002). Kienig furthermore claimed that there is a close relationship between problems emanating at preschool level and problems at primary school entry. Problems such as emotional problems, if confirmed and not attended to in preschools tended to continue even in primary schools. It is therefore imperative that problems are addressed as soon as detected and not left for later when the child is about to go to school. Transition should be seen as a process starting from the time the child enters preschool until well into her/his formal education.

Margetts (2003) conducted a study of adjustment to schooling of 212 children in Melbourne primary schools. Their adjustment was measured by using the SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). This scale consists of 57 items in three domains of social skills, problem behaviour and academic competence. The scale consists of both teacher and parent rating scales. She found that the level of adjustment was closely related to the child's gender, language, parent level of employment and socio-economic status. Girls had higher levels of adjustment than boys, especially in

relation to social skills, and lower levels of problem behaviours. Children whose home language was not English also had difficulty in adjusting to the first year of school. Children whose parents had full-time employment had better self-control than those whose parents were not employed, or employed part-time. The socio-economic background of children was also closely related to children's adjustment.

Despite the different conclusions made by the studies on adjustment levels it remains to be seen if any of these conclusions has any relevancy to my study.

2.2.2 Teachers' views

Teachers hold different views on the transition of children to school. This difference is largely marked by the phase they are teaching in. Their contributions and inputs are, however, imperative for understanding the process of transition and how transition problems are manifested in children. It would be important to see how transitions have been conceptualised by the teachers and whether their sentiments are similar to those of others involved in transitions.

The primary school and the preschool together with the home are the three main agents in the child's transition to school. The child who has a supportive relationship with all three is most likely to make a smooth transition (Margetts, 2002; Fabian, 2002; Richardson, 1997). There was, however, a remarkable difference in how preschool teachers viewed their work as compared to the views of primary school teachers. Primary school teachers' conception of learning was associated with reading and writing. Anything falling outside this scope cannot be ascribed to learning. Pre-primary school teachers, on the other hand, viewed their work as a continuity of what happened in the primary school. Learning, according to them, started right from preschool with basic skills such as recognition of letters, shapes and colours which are basic and foundational to the reading and writing processes (Einarsdóttir, 2003). These views of the preschool and the primary school teachers

may be the result of historical differences in the traditions and philosophies of the two institutions (Neuman, 2002).

Preschools have typically employed play-based methods of teaching and learning whereas primary schools are more content-oriented and their activities are teacher-directed instead of learner-directed. These differences are echoed by teachers themselves, who feel that preschool is a period of innocent playing and that primary school is the beginning of serious times (Einarsdóttir, 2003). These differences seemed to have been internalised by children who now seemed to view starting primary school as a turning point in their lives.

These differences are further accentuated by a study conducted in Copenhagen. Broström (2002:60) reported that in this study aimed to determine transition activities regarded as a "good idea" amongst different teachers, there was a significant difference expressed by preschool teachers compared with primary school teachers. Preschool teachers were seen to be less positive about transition activities, especially of having shared meetings on educational practice and a coordination of the curriculum with the primary school teachers. They were probably worried that a coordination of such nature might result in them implementing a school-oriented curriculum at preschool level.

In another study by the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales between April 1977 and December 1980 on the experiences of children in the age range of three to eight years when transferring to a school, the primary school teachers revealed no knowledge of which preschool the new entrants were from. There was no form of contact visible between the primary schools and the preschools in their vicinity. Half of the schools interviewed received information about new entrants from the preschools, but nothing became of this information as there was discrepancy on the capabilities of the new entrant held by preschool and primary school teachers (Cleave *et al*, 1982, Dunlop, 2002). Teachers expressed their desire not to rely on information from preschools as they treated it with some suspicion –

they preferred to generate their own information regarding each child. However, information regarding the child's biographical details from parents was regarded as important.

The study reported that parents felt they were not accepted in a primary school. They felt the need to know more about what the school offered, but felt repulsed by the teachers' professionalism which kept them at a distance. The teachers' advances towards parents had always been interpreted negatively, seemingly due to a strict appointment system that was unheard of in the pre-primary schools but had come to characterise the way of life of the primary school (Cleave *et al*, 1982; Dunlop, 2002).

The following were mentioned as the best strategies that could facilitate the child's entry into school (Korkatsch-Groszko, 1998; Taal, 2000):

- Pre-entry visits to the schools before the child is admitted into the school should be promoted and encouraged. This is to familiarise the child with the new environment so that it should not be intimidating by the time the child is transferred into the school.

- Forming of new relationships between the teacher and the child and between the child and other peers. The child leaving preschool is leaving behind warm and secure relationships with adults and friends. However, "much depends on the teacher's skill in establishing rapport, on the personalities of teacher and child, and on the teacher's relationship with other children" (Cleave *et al*., 1982:205). A child has to form new relationships with people at school. Throughout this disturbance, the school relies on the family to help ease the transition. A sibling or friend at school is also important in easing the tension.

- Explaining unfamiliar sights, sounds and events; showing him around. The new entrant can be baffled by a number of unfamiliar sounds and events, such as the school bell, older learners, big buildings-and this experience can be

overwhelming. Children need a clear explanation which is sensitive but not too complicated (Dockett & Perry, 2003).

- Encouraging and promoting cooperation between parents and teachers and creating opportunities for the exchange of information is imperative in helping the child to succeed (Dockett & Perry, 2003).

- Disposition and attitudes towards school. Knowing school rules and the behaviour expected from children (Dockett & Perry, 2003).

- Teaching children to regard other children as their equals and to respect them (Korkatsch-Groszko, 1998).

2.2.3 Parental views on transition

The research on transition is not only confined to the children's experiences but includes parents' views on transition as they act as a support system or what Vygotsky calls "scaffolding" to children as they move from one phase of learning to the other (Wertsch, 1986). Despite parents viewing transition with trepidation, Griebel and Niesel (2002) found that the closer the contact between parents and teachers, the less the difference there was in their view of their children's competencies. The less the parents viewed their children positively, the less optimistic they were, irrespective of the teacher's high ratings of such children

When children in British and Italian studies started their first day at school, most parents confessed to feelings of gladness, sadness and apprehension. Some were happy that their children were finally going to school and found it a relief. Comments such as "It'll be such a wrench when he's gone" to "I'll be able to start living again" were overheard from parents as they expressed their anxiety and happiness at the child's possible good or poor adjustment to school (Cleave *et al.*, 1982; Corsaro & Molinari, 2005).

Early studies on transition portrayed the parents as entities separate from the school and what happened in the school. Parents in a British study conducted by Cleave *et al* (1982) felt that boundaries in the primary schools were more rigid and remote than in preschools. These boundaries precluded spontaneous contact between the parent and the teacher and replaced it by appointments if one wished to speak to the teacher. Parents therefore had little time to get to know the teachers and tell them about their children (Cleave *et al.*, 1982). There was a subtle `reproachable' feeling between the staff and the parents with the parents feeling uneasy and unwelcome in the eyes of teachers-although teachers extended an invitation to parents to visit them should a need arise.

A different view of parents from the one espoused above was captured in a study of transition in Germany. In this study, Griebel & Niesel (2002) found that parents of the new entrants into the school expressed their satisfaction with their children's teachers "despite the sadness that some parents expressed about the idea that somebody else would get influence over their child" (Griebel & Niesel, 2002: 72). Developing a positive picture of the teacher promoted sound relationship that were important for the adjustment of their children.

It is important that teachers integrate and involve parents from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Parents from a poor socio-economic background are generally less educated than other parents and lack the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to help their children. Hence, they also appear to be less interested in the education of their children and tend to avoid the schools (Early *et al.*, 1999; Moletsane, 2004). Furthermore, economic hardship has a tendency to undermine parenting, thus causing parents to refrain from active involvement in their children's education.

Parents have also commented that they were confident with the preschool practitioners and the curriculum, but the same could not be said about the primary school. Parents felt less knowledgeable about the primary school curriculum (Dunlop,

2002). The informal contact prevalent in preschools barely survived in primary schools, as these were replaced by more formal appointments which were fewer in number. This limited the parents' ability to get to know the primary school and also the teachers' ability to get to know the children as individuals as had been the case in preschools.

The Starting School Research Project study was conducted by Dockett and Perry (2002b) in Australia. The study was an investigation of the perceptions and expectations of all involved in children's transition to school. This project targeted children, parents and early childhood educators and investigated children's knowledge before staring school, social adjustment and other skills children are expected to possess prior to starting school; and family and educational issues imperative for starting school. The responses for the interviews and questionnaires enabled the project team to describe the important issues for children, parents and educators as children start school. It emerged that both teachers and parents considered knowledge of certain skills as imperative to good adjustments to school, implying that lack of knowledge of these skills will incapacitate one in learning. Parents however disagreed with teachers on how approachable preschool teachers were, with parents feeling very strongly that the preschool teachers were more approachable than primary school teachers. They however agreed that experience of preschool education will be advantageous to the children when starting school. The responses indicate the different views in terms of beliefs and expectations held by the role players as children commence with schooling. Parents' responses are indicative of the relationship they have had with both primary schools and preschools. This experience pervades other studies conducted whereby parents express their disappointment with the fact that they have to make appointments for seeing their children's teacher – a practice which was absent in preschools (Yeboah, 2002).

A Head Start transition study (Ramey & Ramey, 1998) conducted in the USA was aimed at eliciting parents' response in their involvement in their children's education. The Head Start project involved primary school children from disadvantaged

backgrounds (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). Despite their low income level, the Head Start parents said they participated in school activities and even volunteered in their children's schools. However, since these were parents with preschool experience of involvement, it needs to be seen whether similar responses can be obtained from parents without preschool experience in relation to their involvement in a primary school. In a subsequent Head Start Transition Project teachers rated Head Start children's preparedness as high. Parents reported that programmes that involved them and the teachers reduced child stress especially during the first month at school (Kagan & Neuman, 1998).

2.3   GENERAL LIMITATIONS OF TRANSITION RESEARCH

There exists a vast literature on the importance of the transition to school and how those involved in these transitions understand these transitions (Yeboah, 2002; Margetts, 1997; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 2002; and Clarke & Sharpe, 2003). There are a number of strengths and weaknesses in the empirical base which bear some relevance to my study.

2.3.1 First World contexts of transition studies

In the first instance, little is known of the influence and relevance of cultural context on the transition period that children navigate between the home or preschool and the primary school. The empirical research conducted to determine the perception of children, parents, and schoolteachers on how children negotiate the transition as they move from home or preschool into the primary school, gives a detailed account of the Western perception and modern contexts of such transitions (Margetts, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2002a,b; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; and Griebel & Niesel, 2002). The relevance of these experiences to the developing contexts is a matter for thorough investigation and study. Accordingly, these studies remain questionable as to their universal authenticity and application to children, given the

dominant focus on white middle-class children, parents and teachers whose voices and experiences may not be representative of those in developing countries.

The literature on transitions is replete with studies of transitions of children in the developed world. It is not as yet certain the extent to which the findings from these studies are appropriate for developing South Africa.

2.3.2 Cohesion among participants in transitions

While literature and theory has noted the importance of cohesion among all three main agencies in the child's transition, namely the preschool, the primary school and the family, literature and research also recognise that this is often not the case and that practice and lack of cohesion is the reality (Bröstrom, 2002).

In a study conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales between April 1977 and December 1980, primary school teachers accentuated the gap between them and the preschool by maintaining that they were suspicious of information from preschools (Cleave *et al.*, 1982). They also believed that learning started from primary school, and that children were exposed to play throughout their preschool years, and that no learning took place. This view is contrary to the preschool teachers' view, who regarded their work as fundamental to learning in primary school, and that it was imperative for children to go through preschools to acquire important skills that would ease their transition into primary school (Peters, 2000).

This view is compounded by the lack of information on the studies conducted on how key people in the child's transition interact with one another (Pianta & Cox, 1999; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002). The transition often involves an "ecological shift" as it affects the roles, identity and relations of all key people involved. No single individual is affected by transition but a number of key players are affected and shape how transition is being experienced by children. Some roles directly and indirectly have

implications on how transitions are being experienced as successful or not. The impression from the literature is that the interaction of the key players takes place in a harmonious and well-defined manner. There is an assumption that the relationship and roles of each of the key players are well defined and all the roles are executed as indicated. According to Sirotnik (1998), this is contrary to how human ecosystems function. In his study on human and animal ecosystems he explains the complexity in which the human ecosystem functions, being governed by roles, expectations and conflicts in the execution of roles. Role players in the human ecosystem are more likely to clash due to differences in their roles or values and beliefs. This is also likely in the transition to school process. There is a need to address this by exploring the roles of the key players to determine how they execute their mandate and how they influence and shape the transition process in unstable or under-resourced social contexts.

Yeboah (2002) attributes the lack of cohesion among participants in the transition process as due to the historical differences in the traditions and philosophies of the preschool and the primary school as two institutions in the education continuum. The two are characterised by differences in curriculum, teaching approaches, the environment and surroundings, role of parents and what is expected of the children (Yeboah, 2002). Preschools are informal and have an integrated curriculum which is play- and activity-based with the focus on all major areas of child development. The approach is closely related to the constructivist theory in the sense that early childhood encourages children to initiate their own learning activities through play. The primary schools, on the contrary, are formal and the curriculum is subject-based, formal, structured and more intellectually focused. The teacher determines what has to be learned and how it has to be learned (Yeboah, 2002; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1998). There is a clear and distinct move away from the play-based approach of preschool to the primary school focus on teaching and learning.

Another area of concern is in the communication between the parents and teachers. Research has found that greater communication tends to occur when parents have

younger children and fewer children, as well as when parents are socially acquainted with other parents in the child's class or school (Powell, 1998, cited in Seifert, 1992). Parents tend to talk more to teachers who are older, and who are comfortable allowing conversation about concerns that parents have about themselves, such as job or marital problems, as well as concerns focused on the child (Hughes, 1985, cited in Seifert, 1992).

A challenge to reckon with is how to reconcile the differences that exist between the parents and teachers. Parent involvement must question the traditional assumptions that teachers as professionals should keep a degree of emotional distance, and that they should claim expertise for themselves (Seifert, 1992). This attitude of professionals drives parents away from primary schools-hence also their minimal involvement in the education of their children.

The second challenge is how to respond to the demographic changes in families that affect their involvement in school matters. Single-parent families are a reality and so are dual-career families; in some school communities, such parents in fact constitute the majority. Their condition makes it impossible and difficult to communicate with teachers, visit their child's class, or attend parent-teacher meetings. How will this cohort of parents be drawn to the school? Strategies need to be sought that can be used to reach out to such parents, irrespective of the fact that they spend long hours in paid employment (Seifert, 1992).

While changing values within the community encourage female parents to return to the workforce, the move towards smaller nuclear, or single-parent families has imposed new challenges and new stresses on all these parties, and the increased reliance on the teacher to provide the necessary scaffolding to support the child during the transition period (Clyde, 1991).

This nevertheless does not suggest that less or minimal parental participation should be allowed to pervade schools. If the family as a primary education milieu for the child

is disregarded in this area of participation, this will have more complicated and serious consequences for the adjustment of the child. Research claims that the interrelationship between the school, parents, preschool and social agencies is imperative for smooth transitions, and therefore the full support of the parents is needed (Dockett & Perry, 2002a).

The importance of family participation in the child's development and transitions will be delineated by tracing their influence and support over the years through studies conducted. The question remains as to why is it difficult to maintain the relationship between the school and family if families are indeed important in their child's development.

2.3.3 Importance of school-family relationship

According to research, early childhood providers are aware that their partnership success evolved from the full participation of families (Ramey & Ramey, 1994; Richardson, 1997 & Brown, Amwake & Speth, 2002). Ramey and Ramey (1994) support the importance of relationship between the family and the school, stating that it is basic to the adjustment of the child to school and the extent to which a child benefits from school. Brown, Amwake and Speth (2002:2) state the following with regard to community collaboration:

> "…partnerships represent one of the most effective efforts for creating a flexible, comprehensive system that meets the needs of children and families. They involve new relationships among service providers and the children and families they serve. They require time, resources and the willingness of collaborating agencies to learn about and establish trust with each other".

Decisions to target parents in the early stage of their children's lives as a strategy for improving their children's success in school are well-founded. Powell (1995) concedes that longitudinal research evidence exists that the mother's rearing practices and beliefs during early years are closely related to the child's subsequent

performance. Ramey and Ramey (1994) concede that successful transitions to school are based on close and effective working relationships among notable individuals and institutions in the child's life. Diminished parental involvement in primary schools is an indication that the primary school classrooms are out of bounds for parents and therefore ignore the parental support which is imperative if children are to adjust well in a classroom, a condition which is fundamental in successful learning. The Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU, 2004) concurs with this assertion that parental involvement is diminished in primary schools and says that the participation is almost non-existent.

The communication barriers between staff and parents may weaken efforts to bridge the children's learning from home to school. If parents and teachers hold different views as to what the child should be able to do and know prior to coming to school, then any efforts towards the adaptation of the child at school will be doomed (Neuman, 2002).

The relationship that the family has with the child's school is invaluable in supporting positive school outcomes. Children absorb life experiences that form their character, feelings and values from parents. Parents can either provide learning experiences haphazardly or they can consciously plan for quality experiences to occur in their children in a more responsible manner (Korkatsch-Groszko, 1998). Establishing this relationship at the preschool level and encouraging these relationships as children enter school can have long-term consequences for family involvement in the children's education. Families benefit from feedback about their child and the educational services they are receiving. Equally important is the information schools receive from families (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000).

Children learn at home as well as at school. Educational practitioners and policy makers alike recognise that no single institution can create all the conditions that students need in order to learn and develop in healthy, responsible and caring ways.

Educators, parents and members of the community need to be effective and collaborative partners.

The literature emphasises the importance of relationships and the cooperation of the principal role players in transitions, even if this is hard to realise. In a study conducted by the National Centre for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) in 1996 teachers, despite having a lot of teaching experience and education, lamented the lack of training or information on transition practices (Early *et al.,* 1999). If teachers are oblivious to their role as facilitators of transitions due to lack of information, it would be unfair to put the blame on their shoulders if the transition process does not go as planned.

Within the understanding espoused above, this study will find out more about the relationships between primary schools and parents /homes and how each perceive their role to be in promoting and enhancing smooth transition of children from preschool and home to primary school. It will further determine the amount of information teachers have with regard to transition, how they acquired the information and what benefit it holds for them, especially in facilitating transitions.

2.3.4 The developmental theory bias of transition studies

The ECD field has largely been influenced and shaped by developmental perspectives of theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky (Follari, 2007). The literature on transition seems to be reeling from the influences of developmental theories. Developmental theories themselves have a tendency of prescribing developmental milestones for all childhoods. However, the research that led to determination of these theories was on privileged middle-class children, whose context is different from that of children in a developing context. These developmental theories are prescriptive of how development should be understood. The developmental milestones promoted by these theories may not be valid for all childhoods. What is being prescribed may furthermore not be appropriate for other cultural contexts.

Similar concerns are raised about the application of recommendations around transition to school. Since most of transition studies have been carried out in developed western countries, in which children frequently attend a preschool service prior to starting school, the transition of children moving from home into the primary schools does not enjoy prominence with these studies (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Margetts, 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 2002; Einarsdóttir, 2003). The home-to-school transitions in countries such as South Africa are much more marked for the majority of children. It is precisely this gap which this study will address by broadening the context of application.

2.3.5 The universal construction of childhood

Cultural values and ideas about childhood give rise to the conception of childhood (Dawes & Donald, 2000). Studies conducted in developed countries are framed by the socio-cultural context of developed contexts, and this in turn influences their conception of the child (Einarsdóttir, 2003). For example in research in developed countries the child's voice is often reported in ways that represent the children as articulate. By contrast, children from developing countries may be described as withdrawn due to their lack of interest in engaging in verbal interactions (Moletsane, 2004).

In the African context, for example, obedience is regarded as a virtue to be cultivated in all children. This kind of virtue may be interpreted by other cultural groups as a sign of authoritarianism and that it breeds mutes and children without voices (Dawes & Donald, 2000). The need for obedience may arise in contexts that are perceived as dangerous for children. This may be a source of protection for these children.

This raises the issues: Are the developmental milestones appropriate to understand children's development in a developing context? How relevant are the findings in the studies conducted to a developing context? One has to be careful of referring to

universal childhood, especially if we say that the children's childhood is socially constructed and is shaped by the cultural and socio-economic conditions that reign in their context.

> "The globalisation of ideas of childhood promoted from the West-as a culture-free and timeless concept-takes no account of the conditions of existence of children in poor communities where such concepts may be totally inapplicable" (Prout & James, 1997:87).

This perception of childhood is tantamount to the imposition of a Western conceptualisation of childhood for all children, which according to Prout & James "conceals the fact that the institution of childhood is a social construction" (1997:10). The universalistic conception of childhood is questionable, as the authentic experience of childhood is "real" within its own "regime of truth" (Prout & James, 1997). Frones quoted in Prout & James (1997: xiii), in disputing the universalistic conception of childhood, says:

> "There is not one childhood, but many formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems, natural and man-made physical environments. Different positions in society produce different experiences".

Children's childhood is constructed within and outside the child, and it is a social as well as a cultural construction. It cannot therefore be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender or ethnicity. It is within the cultural, economic and social developing context that my study was located.

2.3.6 The silencing of children's voices in implementation plans

Children's voices are recognised in studies of transitions to school. What is not known is the extent to which these voices influence and shape the transitions children experience. There is a progressive movement in research based on children, which advocates a shift towards using children's voices and participation in research involving them, instead of relying on an adult's voice. Research has begun to veer towards recognising children's voices; a lot still needs to be done in other fronts to

include this seldom recognised arena as of importance in understanding children's understanding and the meaning they give to their own environment. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a world body with South Africa in 1994 being one of its signatories, acknowledged children's right to have freedom of expression especially in matters that affect them (1989).

There is a growing number of professionals who emphasise giving children a voice in factors that influence their lives, including involving them in research. This factor may be attributed to the changing view of the child and childhood. The child is now seen as a co-constructor of meaning and knowledge and that his/her voice should be taken seriously (Boyden & Ennew, 1997). Mayall, in agreeing with the perception that children's voices should be recognised, says that children are a social group:

> "…a permanent feature of society, thus their knowledge of what it means to be a child and what it means to children to engage with adult individuals and adult social groups is needed as part of the task of improving our understanding of how the social order works" (2000:121).

Mayall (2000) adds that we should move away from the adult-structured view of childhood to seek a true picture of childhood through children's eyes, so as to understand transition to school from their perspective.

Transition difficulties are faced by children, but unfortunately they have little say in shaping them and in influencing what is to constitute transition programmes. This is a flaw that permeates transition programmes, a tendency to regard children as recipients of transition programmes rather than as active participants who are shaped by and who shape their experiences. In the research project Starting School Research conducted by Dockett and Perry (2001a), the authors came to the conclusion that children can and do make valuable contributions to transition programmes and that listening to their views, responding to their challenges, and respecting their understandings can assist in understanding the difficulties they face. School and class rules such as "you don't get into trouble", and children's ability to make friends were key concerns for children (Dockett & Perry, 2003).

This knowledge concerning the acknowledgement of children's voices influenced the research methodology so that it articulated the importance of children's voices in data collection.

2.3.7 The age-of-entry problem in transition studies

One area raised in transition studies that lacked consensus was age as a determinant of starting school and school success. There are studies done that link school success to age; however, they are not conclusive about the appropriate age itself (Margetts, 2003; Kienig, 2002). In spite of this, countries use different ages as determinant for starting school (Einarsdóttir, 2003; Margetts, 2003; Neuman, 2002; Dunlop, 2002; Richardson, 1997). The school entrance age differs from one country to another, from five years in Sweden to Australia admitting children from as young as four and a half to five years. In South Africa children are admitted to school in the year in which they turn seven. Raising the entrance age has not made any remarkable difference in comparison to children who are younger at the time of starting school (Dockett & Perry, 2002b). Vo-Vu (1999), however, defends the use of the chronological age as the sole ethical criterion for starting school. She points out that if entry age is the same for all children, schools will have an equitable strategy that is sensitive to the differences between children. Is the chronological age the solution to transition hiccups, or are there other variables deemed more important than age? Research on the age of entry into school is not conclusive on the recommended age for starting school. Dockett and Perry (2002b) reported that in the Starting School Research Project 60% of the respondents indicated that "age is not a good predictor of school success" (2002:3). However countries still rely on age as criterion for starting school (Dockett & Perry, 2002b). Some countries start school as early as four years whilst some have delayed entry until seven years of age. Despite research strongly supporting older children as more capable of making better adjustments than younger ones, some research claim that younger children in the

classroom make as much progress academically and socially as their older classmates in the early grades (Carlton, Winsler & Marths,1999).

According to the literature there is a positive correlation between age as a criterion for starting school, and the developmental milestones of the developmental theories. However, developmental theories themselves are based on the naturalness and the universality of the child, which in reality do not exist. Every childhood is determined by the social, economic and cultural factors in which it exists. Due to each individual child's experiences, children may attain the developmental milestones at different ages. It would be wrong to talk about one globalised view of childhood, as children's experiences differ from one context to the other.

2.3.7.1   The maturationist view

Maturationists hold a different view regarding age as a determinant of school readiness or being ready to learn. School readiness in this text will be used as synonymous with readiness to learn. Children's development, according to this view, is regulated by biological time clocks. Their development cannot be accelerated but can only wait for the inner time clock to register progress. Carlton, Winsler and Marths (1999) argue that the construct of school readiness has suffered from a narrow, maturationist theoretical perspective, which presents the problem as residing solely within the child; instead, it is the school system which determines school readiness. Most teachers hold the view that school readiness is a series of physiological stages governed by the child's individual internal timetable, and that it has little to do with parental or teacher intervention. Whatever constitutes school readiness, whether it has to do with maturational factors or environmental factors or the combination of both, at the end of this struggle is the child who has to make a satisfactory transition to Grade 1. The child's failure to demonstrate readiness is perceived to be a problem for the individual child. If the development of the child is determined biologically then the cause of any problem must lie with the individual, rather than the environment or those around him. This view often refers to children as needing "more time" to

become ready. Age would become an important criterion in determining school readiness, thus nullifying research which maintains that age is not significant in how children make transitions. Age as a criterion for starting school was noted as important in transitions of children (Dockett & Perry, 2002a).

2.3.8 Cognitive development and socio-emotional development

Over the past years research has demonstrated that children's emotional and social skills are linked to their early academic standing. Children who have difficulty paying attention, following directions, getting along with others, and controlling negative emotions of anger and distress do less well in school (Cohen, 2001). For many children, academic achievement in their first few years of schooling appears to be built on a firm foundation of children's emotional and social skills (Cybele, 2003). Specifically, emerging research on early schooling suggests that the relationships that children build with peers and teachers are based on children's ability to regulate emotions in pro-social versus antisocial ways and that those relationships then serve as source of provisions that either help or hurt children's chances of doing well academically (Cybele, 2003).

Most of the primary school teachers in the transition studies conducted indicated that social and emotional skills were imperative in academic achievement. Parents differed, however, in that they elevated cognitive skills above all else (Griebel & Niesel, 2002). In a Singaporean study, parents were interviewed on what their concerns were as their children made a move to a primary school. The majority of parents expressed their concern on how their children would cope with maths, mother tongue instruction, tests and exams (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003), whilst others were concerned with how their children were to adjust to their new surroundings.

Schools not only involve developing cognitive skills, but also establishing friendships, developing interactive skills with groups, and understanding oneself and one's behaviours. Certainly the social and emotional experiences of children in the primary

school years are an essential determinant of their successful transitions in the later school years. In the school, children rely on their understanding of self and their knowledge of how to work cooperatively in groups, to solve problems, and to communicate effectively in order to be successful (Fopiano & Haynes, 2001).

The context in which these life skills are taught and practised is as important as the skills themselves. Schools must also consider that children of average intellectual abilities but with superior social and emotional skills may be found to be more successful both in and outside of school (Fopiano & Hayes, 2001).

> "Since the goal of schooling is to prepare children to succeed, it is paramount for students of all cognitive skill levels to have increased school exposure to expanded education in the social and emotional realm" (Fopiano & Haynes, 2001:48).

2.3.9 Preschool to primary school bias in transition research

There is an expansive literature on transition of young children from home or preschool into a Grade 1 class (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Margetts, 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 2002; Einarsdóttir, 2003). Studies conducted support the positive influence of preschools on the adjustment of children in formal schooling (Margetts, 2002).

However, the bulk of this literature addresses transition of children from preschool to school and seldom from home to school. In the contexts in which these studies on transition were done, most of the children came from some form of care centre. This is confirmed by a research study on transition in Australia that came to the conclusion that most Australian children have some experience of childcare outside the home prior to commencing school (Margetts, 2003).

According to the Department of Education's White Paper No.1 on Education and Training (1995), continuity between home, educare, preschool and the early years of formal schooling has to be promoted and enforced as much as possible-but this continuity remains elusive for many children in South Africa. This is confirmed by the

Early Learning Resource Unit in their report on a Grade R pilot training programme designed to strengthen home/school and Grade R/Grade 1 transition by stating that:

> "…teachers also fail to understand that the Grade R and Grade 1 skills are on a continuum rather than discrete. In order to deliver a more integrated learning programme, contact between teachers of Grade R and Grade 1 needs to be strengthened (ELRU, 2004:7).

Lack of continuity from early childhood education to primary school adversely affects the child's successful transition to school (Yeboah, 2002; La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000). It is evident in the children's experiences in the studies conducted that preschool is synonymous with play and primary school with serious academic work. Their transition to Grade 1 can become even more overwhelming if children did not attend preschool, as they may face greater challenges due to the presumed discontinuity between home and school settings (Bowman quoted in La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999: 2) furthermore add that it is even more important for family-school relationships during the transition to school for children who experience greater levels of discontinuity in culture, as they attend school for the first time. However discontinuity is not something to be avoided, provided that appropriate scaffolding is given especially to those children for whom transition is difficult. Graue in Peters (2002) places greater responsibility on adults, i.e. both teachers and parents, to ease the child into the new environment.

Neuman, writing on the discontinuities between preschool and primary schools, says that the discontinuities are not only on structural and pedagogical levels; the disparities in training, salaries and working conditions make the discontinuities unavoidable: "These institutional barriers may make it challenging for professionals to form equal partnerships to support young children" (Neuman, 2002:12). These factors may be compounded by the fact that there is no assigned preschool to a "feeder" school, with the result that parents can take their children to their school of choice.

Neuman (2002) noted that structural divisions whereby the preschool has separate amenities and buildings from the school may further limit links and communication

between the two institutions. These discontinuities are also apparent in the case of the home and the school whereby the parents and teachers may hold different attitudes and beliefs concerning what their children should be able to do and know before coming to school.

2.4   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH ON TRANSITIONS FOR MY STUDY

The literature review has provided a global view on the knowledge base on transitions, and the processes and problems experienced by those who have been involved in them. This knowledge will be significant in understanding and appreciating the difficulties and factors that support transition for children as they move from one context of development and learning into another. The literature illuminates variables that are deemed important, such as having a friend or an older sibling when starting school, making a pre-visit to the school before enrolment. How these variables are conceived and their relevance to transition in developing context will be addressed in my study. The studies conducted have highlighted the trajectory of ECD and how transition has evolved and what it means or to, or how it is understood by those key players in the sector. This knowledge is imperative in understanding the roles and influences of people involved in transitions.

My study on transitions of children was located within a broader understanding of transitions, as gleaned from the literature review. Children's views on transition and their experiences in the literature were used to understand the experiences of children in my developing context. The experiences of teachers and parents were also used to gauge the degree to which parents and teachers conform to them in the context of my study. The studies conducted helped me understand how those involved in transitions negotiate them and what factors underpin those strategies and how successful they are in helping in the smooth transition. The knowledge base these studies have provided me with was crucial in understanding transitions and strategies used in facilitating these transitions.

The methodologies used in collecting data in transitions exposed me to a variety of data collection strategies that were relevant in my study. Some of these methodologies, especially the interview of children was employed to find out how children in a developing context experience transitions.

Data collected in the transition studies were used to compare the experiences of children in different contexts and the extenuating circumstances that bring about differences in their experiences. As most of the current literature has evolved in relation to developed contexts, my study has focused on transitions in a developing context. This provides opportunities for adding to the knowledge base about transitions in both developed and developing contexts.

My study traced the transition of children in a developing country context such as South Africa. Children in this context enter the first grade of formal education either straight from home or coming from some care centre. Preschools, including care centres or crèches, are not subsidised by the government and therefore rely on school fees paid by children to run their daily lives. Grade R is still part of the informal education and is perceived as the first grade in a primary school. Through a proclamation of the Education White Paper No. 5 on Early Childhood Development, a provision was made in 2001 for the development of a national curriculum that is compulsory for all 5-6-year-olds before being accepted to Grade 1. However, most of these Grade R classes are situated in primary schools, the purpose being that these children would also benefit from the government feeding scheme which only operates in government schools. The other reason was the fact that these Grade R classes could be better monitored by the government officials as the schools themselves fall under the government control.

2.5   CONCLUSION

A comprehensive explanation of studies done on transition has been captured in this chapter. These studies were representative of the three most important agencies in

transition, namely the school, parents and children and their interrelationship in promoting smooth transition. However most of the studies done were carried out in developed western countries. My study will focus on transition in a developing context.

Chapter Three will explain the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Since this study is multifaceted it implies that a number of theories will be employed to understand the contexts in which it will be based.