CHAPTER 3

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – VARIABLES SHAPING THE TRANSITION PROCESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The study undertaken is based on the conceptions of the nature of transitions, how transitions take place and what variables impact on the process and product of the transition phase. Transition to school refers to a process that occurs during the few years in a child's life when he/she, the family and schools make adaptations in facilitating the child, family and the school in the primary school years. Transitions imply that change is bound to take place and this change is associated with new behaviours that are required by the new environment in which one finds oneself. Children adjust better in these situations when they are supported by teachers and parents as well as peers they regard as friends (Ladd & Price 1987). According to research, children who are well adjusted to a first year of formal schooling have a good chance of succeeding in their academic field (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002).

In this chapter I am going to explain the interconnectedness of different theories emanating from the Ecological theory expounded by Bronfenbrenner and how the theories highlight subtle issues and relationships important in transition. These theories will guide the research on how transitions are conceptualised and lived.

3.2 CONCEPTIONS OF TRANSITION

Transitions are defined as "phases of life changes connected with developmental demands" that are determined by social, economic and cultural variables in existence

in the context in which they are being carried out (Niesel and Griebel, 2005). Transitions can lead to further development and can also lead to difficulties. Going to school for the first time is an unconditional expectation made on children by society. This suggests that at a certain stage children are expected to leave home or preschool for the formal schooling. The presupposition is that a certain degree of preparedness marks this phase, as it is expected of every child to make this type of transition. Cowan & Hetherington (1991) signify this stage as similar to passing a life marker, in that every child without fail is expected to go this route, and therefore one has to be ready to undertake this journey. Cowan & Hetherington (1991:3) therefore perceive transitions as a "long-term process that results in qualitative reorganisation of both inner life and external behaviours".

Transition is not a "once-off" event, but a process that begins when a child enters preschool and lasts throughout the child's formal school days. It is imperative for schools to establish relationships with the preschools and parents of children long before the children are admitted. The families play an important role in children's learning and achievement. Some children learn values, attitudes, skills and behaviours in the homes that prepare them well for the tasks of the school (Christenson, 1999).

Since the child's transition does not happen in a vacuum; a number of variables such as the home, preschool and school and the wider community affect the way in which these transitions are traversed (Wong Ngai Chun, 2003). Whilst these variables shape the manner in which children experience transition, children are however given little voice to influence and determine the direction they take. Mayer (2004) highlights the importance of the child as an active constructor in the transition process. Transitions are not only determined by societal influences but they are also determined by the influence of the biological and psychological structure of children.

This study is multidimensional in focus and it involves various role players in different contexts. It is based on the ecological systems theory expounded by Bronfenbrenner

(1979). A number of theoretical perspectives which take as their premise Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory are used as a lens to understand the complexity of transition and the roles accorded principal players in the transition of children to school.

3.3 BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL THEORY

Bronfenbrenner viewed human development as a "product of interaction between the growing human organism and its environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:16). His ecological systems theory is based on the premise that a person's development occurs within a complex system of relationships which are also affected by different levels of their social and cultural environment. He argued that an individual is not influenced by the immediate environment only but that a person's development is "profoundly affected by events occurring in settings in which the person is not even present" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 3).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) described and mapped the various contexts or systems that influence children's development and suggested that the ecological environment is made up of concentric structures or layers which build outwards depending on the influence they have on the developing person. These settings range from immediate relationships the child enters into with the family and schools, to belief systems and ideologies that influence child rearing and development. The developing person is in the innermost layer (microsystem) and their immediate world is the home or the school. The next layer (mesosystem) consists of the interrelationship taking place within a setting. The third layer consists of settings and events that influences a person's development and occur in the absence of the person such as parents work, health services, housing etc. The fourth and outermost layer is known as the macrosystem and includes forces more remote from the child and family such as government policies, culture and values. These are illustrated in Figure 3.1. The child is not in a direct relationship with all of these layers or systems nor is the child, family or school necessarily aware of their existence.

All systems are dependent on one another and need joint participation and sharing of information to function effectively. One characteristic put forward that defines the ecology of human development is that a developing person is never viewed as a tabula rasa. The developing person is influenced and also influences and restructures his environment in a reciprocal manner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

This study is thus founded on the notion that the transition of children from home, preschool or Grade R to primary school is influenced and shaped by social institutions such as the parents, school, the government and the wider community, and by the children themselves.

These influences 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 do not happen to the child alone, but also involve the adults who lend support to make the transitions easy and successful. 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).

This theory has been chosen to underpin this study and its application is substantiated by the literature. The Life Course Theory (Mayer, 2004) and the,Ecological model of Dunlop and Fabian (2002) and other transition models are derived and based on the ecological systems theory expounded by Bronfenbrenner. They agree that the transition process is determined by the interrelationships and cohesiveness of those involved and the influences of social and cultural contexts.

3.3.1 Ecological model for transition

Dunlop and Fabian (2002) in explaining the transition process have developed a model based on the four concentric levels or structures as postulated by

Bronfenbrenner in which children's development occurs. This model of transition takes as its premise Bronfenbrenner's argument that a developing person is influenced by and also influences their environment. The interrelationship of all the variants in the environment despite the distance they are from the developing person are indirectly influencing and shaping their development. The four concentric layers are used to understand specifically the transition of children into the school. Figure 3.1 explains the influences or systems operating at different levels.

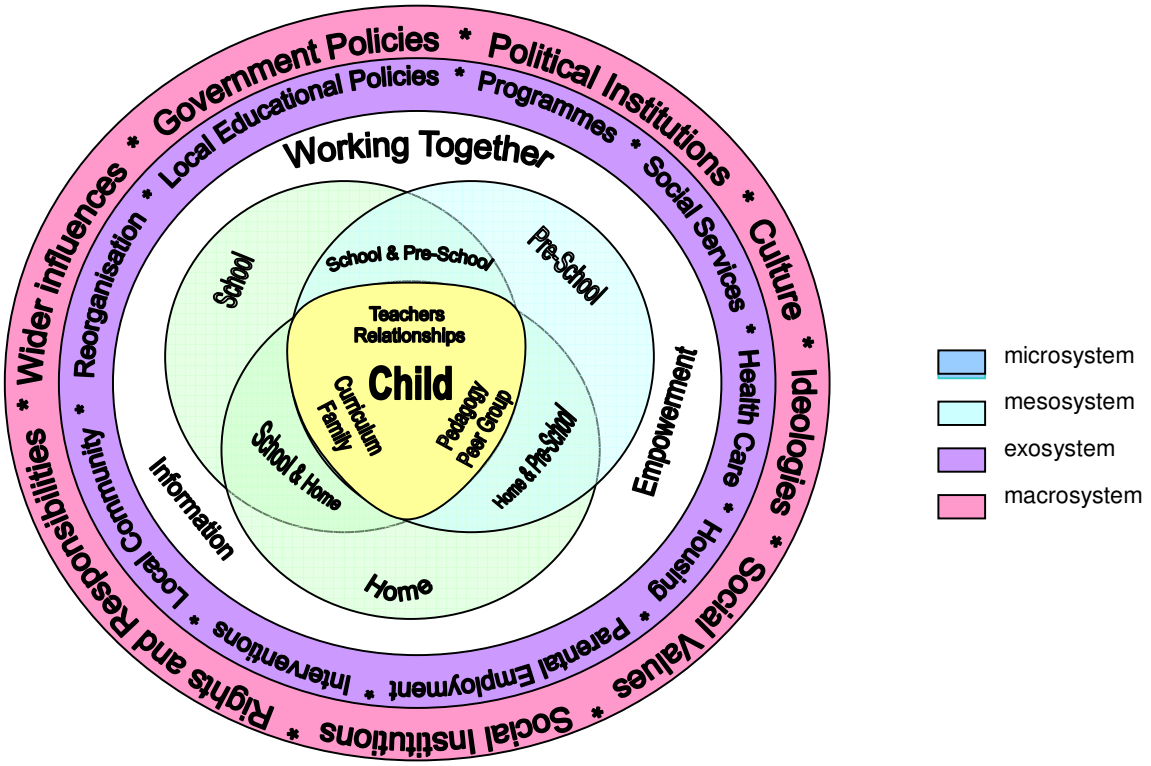

Figure 3.1: Four levels of transition settings (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002:151)

Children in educational transition occupy four levels which directly and indirectly shape and influence how transitions are experienced not by children only, but all those who are key in how transitions are being experienced.

The microsystem level consists of three systems: home, preschool and school. This is the first level in which the child interacts and establishes relationships with other role

players. The next level that arises from these interrelationships at the microsystem level is the mesosystem. The relationships that occur within and between home, preschool and school and how well they interconnect and communicate with one another, can set the child on a course for success or failure. These inter-relationships should be harmonious, if the child is to make a successful transition into the first year of school (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002). Relationships or interconnections in the mesosystem do not occur in a vacuum; they are also influenced and shaped by the environment in which they occur. The environment is never static; it influences and is influenced by those who occupy it (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The third level, the exosystem, is the level that has an indirect influence on the transition of the child. Educational policies, programmes and health care may have a profound effect on how transitions are interpreted and implemented at a school. Employment is also an important variable in the third level as policies around the workplace affects the child indirectly and how school is experienced by children (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002).

Beyond this level is the macrosystem level, which may include government policies, effects of social and political institutions and the significance of the wider social values, ideologies and sub-cultures. “These environments extend beyond the behaviour of individuals and the immediate situation encompassed, but nevertheless have immediate significance” (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002).

There are diverse cultural and childhood discourses and these may also have a profound effect on how the interconnections and interrelationships are interpreted and negotiated by different settings - with the result that there may be disparities in how children negotiate the transitions. Each of these stakeholders views childhood from a different perspective. In most cases, this childhood discourse adopted by these role players does not include the child’s view of him/herself (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus the influence of these variables will be felt in how they are being interpreted by those driving the transition process, and how those at the “core” of transitions relate to

them. The likelihood is that due to different interpretations given to government policies, transitions will be experienced differently from one context to the other.

3.3.2 The significance of relationships

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory gives the impression that the cohesion between the factors at play in the transition process takes place without hindrance. Lack of synergy and synchrony in these interrelationships will throw the whole process into discord (Moletsane, 2004; Early *et al*., 1999). Moletsane (2004) claims that economic hardship has a tendency of undermining parenting with the result that, parents might not show interest in their children's education. It is however the cohesiveness within the group, and how each member of the group experiences the interconnectivity, that determines the success or failure of the process.

There is frequently a perceived distance between the home and the school. According to Christenson (1999), this distance is the result of the autonomy declared by the two institutions on themselves. The school's programme, unlike that of the preschool, appears more bureaucratic in nature, thus allowing limited opportunity for dialogue and frequency of contacts between the families and school. While schools are charged with the responsibility of educating children, they should nevertheless involve parents as much as possible, since the family is a powerful and influential requirement for success in formal education (Christenson, 1999). This relationship is also essential to counter information from competing sources such as television and peers, and discontinuities between families and schools compromise the effectiveness of either parents or schools as socialising agents.

If each part of the system is seen as depending on the other, then joint participation, working together and sharing of information is seen as important for successful transitions. If this statement is to hold true, it implies that all the stakeholders such as parents, preschool, primary school, the wider community and the government need to know the information regarding each part of the system and its involvement so that

this information can be aligned to each one's involvement. Neuman (2002) concurs with this view when she maintains that 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. Dunlop and Fabian (2002) claim that ecological transitions bring shifts in roles, settings, identity or curriculum.

The transition process itself may determine how a person is treated, acts, thinks or feels, i.e. it has an altering and changing power over the child-which may be desirable or undesirable. This emphasises the view that this process is not a simplistic one whereby the stakeholders' roles are well defined and are aligned with one another to produce desirable results, but it is largely determined by the cohesiveness of the goals of the role players, and how they influence one another in their quest to promote smooth transitions for children. Neuman (1996), quoted in Kagan and Neuman (1998:12), says that "since both teachers and parents play a large role in facilitating children's transitions, their disparate goals and attitudes may have far-reaching effects on continuity in children's development and learning-especially when they begin school".

Graue (1999) suggested it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that it is ready to adapt to the diverse and changing needs of the children, who are dependent on the school's ability to extend itself towards them instead of children alone being ready to meet the demands of the school. The school therefore has to take the initiative of reaching out to families and preschools to ensure the continuity of experiences between the primary school and the preschool, including the home. Gaps in the experiences of children have to be filled in by the schools by adapting the school experiences to match those of the children it will be receiving.

In recognising the importance of inter-relationships between the different ecological levels for successful transition to school, Pianta & Cox (1999) articulated three steps or principles that are critical for successful transition programs.

- Reach out – create links with families and preschools
- Reach backwards – establish links before the first day of school
- Reach out with intensity – personal contacts with families (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

In building coherence they also emphasised the need for agreement of policies and practices between the preschool and primary school.

3.3.3 Transition and the structural and cultural context

The Life Course theory has elaborated on the ecological theory by adopting a multidisciplinary approach for the study of people's lives, structural contexts and the social change that shape their development (Mayer, 2004). Similar to ecological theory, it has situated an individual in terms of structural or cultural place (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005) and has connected individuals' lives to the historical and the socioeconomic context in which these lives unfold. A child's early .school social adjustment and academic achievement is linked to their families' economic standing. However, instead of viewing the influences of interrelationships as a process whereby parents and other adults impart and impose values and habits on the child, Life Course theory notes that there is a mutual interaction whereby all participants undergo some form of change (Mayer, 2004). There has to be synchrony and synergy in the manner in which the participants execute their roles. This mutual interaction takes place within a defined social context and may differ from one social context to the other. Noting the importance of the social context as imperative in mutual interaction, Mayer said, "Human lives are embedded in social contexts and are powerfully regulated and constrained by such contexts" (2004:169). Human

development is never free of social influences and is to a large extent determined and shaped by these social forces.

3.3.4 Transition and socio-emotional development

> "Transitions involve major reorganisation of each person's psychological life space, when we look inward to the self and outward to the world, we see and feel things we never experienced before. There is perceived discontinuity between the way it was and the way it seems to be now, and usually this change is accompanied by some emotional turmoil" (Cowan & Hetherington, 1991:13).

Transition to school is both an engaging and disengaging process (Fabian, 2002). The preschool and/or home has been a familiar environment from which the child now has to disengage. Children endure cultural severance and undergo emotional conflicts as they have to adapt to the new school culture they have moved to.

Transition therefore presupposes that socio-emotional development is affected and shaped in a particular way. As already mentioned by Pianta and Cox (1999) it is the schools' action that would ease the emotional impact on the child as he/she transits from one setting to the other.

As noted by Fabian, 2000 and Dockett and Perry (2003), transition is a bidirectional process that impacts on the social and emotional development of children and this in turn also shapes the socio-emotional development of others involved in this process. This conceptualisation of transition is based on van Geenep's anthropological approach on transitions in all aspects of life, such as puberty, adolescence, getting married and others (van Geenep, 1960). Each step the child takes marks a turning point in how the passage is perceived and how the relationships are experienced. For example, meeting the first teacher marks a rite of passage that is full of its own expectations and it is accompanied by a certain degree of stress if some of the adaptations accompanying the passage are not suited to the context. If a rite of passage is defined as a ritual, i.e. as a procedure followed regularly, then it implies

that there are guidelines and procedures available for negotiating this transition. Rites of passage in life are contextually defined, and are experienced differently by different groups (van Geenep, 1960).

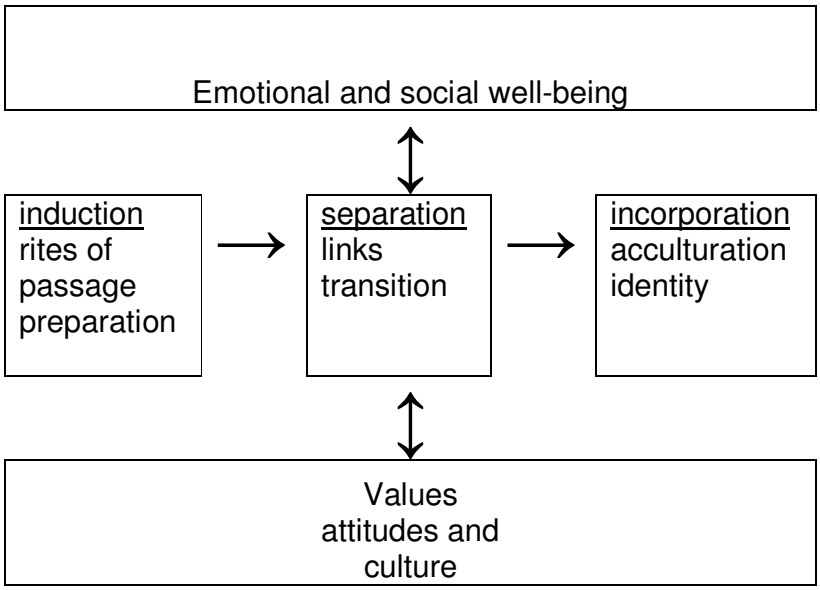

Figure 3.2: Processes of transition to school (adapted from Fabian, 2000:144)

Figure 3.2 illustrates different transition processes that influence emotional and social wellbeing of an individual as much as the socio-emotional state of those facilitating these transitions. The diagram also demonstrates the bi-directional influences with contextual influences (values, attitudes and culture). Before any transition can begin, there has to be thorough preparation and induction of how transitions have to take place. This induction or preparation should be done by the preschool and the home. The child is therefore ready to separate from his/her familiar context to another. However, there needs to be very strong links between the child's previous context and the new context such as between the school and the home and between the preschool and the primary school. The last stage in the transition process is the incorporation and acculturation stage whereby the child becomes incorporated as one of the members of the new context by identifying with this context. The child and the family can only become successful in making these transitions if the guidelines for

each stage are well spelled out and comprehensible for the child to "navigate this ecological shift" (Fabian, 2000).

3.4 CONCLUSION

Given the different explanations of theories and their relevancy in understanding the variables that influence how transitions are to be made, these theories are basic and foundational to this study as they all address transitions from different avenues. Transitions cannot be understood from one lens. Transitions are multifaceted as they are shaped by a number of factors, and in the same breath they are context specific, since the experiences of those who undergo them differs according to the context in which they happen.

The ecological theory takes a premise that the child is a situated being, and his development is dictated to by factors in his environment. The life course theory extends this by maintaining that the child is not a passive actor but he determines his/her own destiny. The same also can be said of a child transiting from Grade R or home into Grade 1. The factors in the child's environment, unique as they are, are responsible in how the child experiences transitions as positive or negative. The environment has to be conducive for transitions. Fabian (2003) concedes that transition affects the socio-emotional well being of an individual. This implies that transitions can at times be turbulent and therefore have to be negotiated carefully.

Since transition involves change, it therefore implies that the emotions of an individual are affected. Change also may imply that different contexts and different people become the new feature. Since transitions affect the socio-emotional being of a person, it implies that for one to undergo this process one should be emotionally ready to take on the challenges accompanied by the process.

Transition can therefore never be understood as impacting on the child only; all the other role factors are affected-some more than others, according to their closeness to the child experiencing those transitions. Sanders and Epstein (1998) postulate a

theory of overlapping spheres that integrate the effects of the family, school and community on educational outcomes. Acknowledging the importance of the role played by major institutions that socialise and educate children, the theory posits that "certain goals, such as student development and academic success, are of interest to all these institutions and are best achieved through their cooperative action and support" (Sanders & Epstein, 1998:483). Transition and subsequent change therefore do not reside with the child alone, but with all other key players important in bringing about change and academic success.

This study looked at transitions from the perspective outlined above. The extent to which transitions in the context of my study was understood was based on the theoretical models expounded above. The four tier model with the government institutions and social institutions such as the employment play a key role in indirectly influencing how transitions are being experienced. The policies passed by these institutions indirectly influence the degree to which transitions will be experienced negatively or positively. The school, home and preschool directly influence and shape how transitions are being experienced by those who undergo them. The manner in which they prepare for transitions and the strategies they use to facilitate them determines whether children will experience them as successful or not. All transitions are underlined by some emotional and social disturbance as children move from the familiar environment to the unfamiliar one.

The next chapter will delineate and outline the process and course the study will take. The research design and methodology are explained in detail and the procedure outlining how data were dealt with will be highlighted. The context of the study is explained, the participants and the sample selection are dealt with. The research questions are analysed individually and the strategies used to collect data are explained in detail. The process of data analysis is also dealt with. Issues of validity and ethical concerns are being addressed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The research project sets out primarily to explore and document the transition of children from home or preschool into Grade 1. This project was both a qualitative and a quantitative study. The study used an interpretive paradigm to understand how transitions are negotiated by children. This study is multifaceted in that it used different lenses in understanding transitions.

The first phase of the study was a survey of policy positions on transitions. In this survey, policy documents were reviewed; and government officials and officials from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were interviewed on their understandings and interpretation of policies dealing with transitions.

The second phase involved case studies of two schools and twelve children from each of the two schools in two provinces in South Africa – Province A and Province B. A comparison was undertaken to investigate and compare the merits or otherwise of the transition strategies deployed by the two schools in the sample, any influence from the provincial system, and any significant differences in their approaches to transitions, and what informed those approaches. Schools were from similar socio-economic contexts. The objective of this comparison was to evaluate strategies used by the two schools to determine the extent to which policy influenced the course chosen by the schools, how policy itself is understood and interpreted by the two schools, and how children adjust to school. Children who went to preschool were compared against those who did not to evaluate the impact Grade R has had on preparing them for formal schooling.

The research questions which underlined this study are discussed below. These are aligned to the research methodology and are important to understanding key players' conception of transitions and what meaning and interpretations are accorded to these transitions.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are imperative for understanding the choice of the research methodologies and the course the study took. Not only do research questions inform the methodologies chosen, but they are also important in understanding the complexity of the study field and all the subtle factors that affect and shape the course of the study.

The research questions were derived from the aim of the study which was to investigate the policy position for the transition of children to Grade 1 and teacher and parent understandings and practices. The process of collecting data was underlined by policy document analysis and interviews of various stakeholders involved in children's transition and the use of the Social Skills Rating System to determine their ability in making appropriate adjustments. These research questions will be dealt with individually and linked to the methodology deployed for data collection.

What are the official policy provisions and interpretations for learner transitions from preschool to Grade 1 in South Africa? This question is key to understanding the provision, purpose and position of the government policies in addressing the transition issues. A document content analysis was carried out of all major and minor policy documents in South Africa concerned with the transition to formal schooling. The main emphasis was, however, on White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (2002). The analysis helped me to understand school policies and practices, and their role in helping to ease the transition problems of children in their (school's) care. I also interviewed key

government officials, NGOs concerned with the design of transition policy, and schools to deepen my understanding of the ways in which bureaucracy intends to redress problems of transition.

***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*?** Data were compared as gleaned from the parent and teacher interviews and the interviews with government officials and NGOs, the analysis of school strategies and policies and the government's intervention analysis of formal policy provisions. From the data, the reasons for the support of coordination or lack of between policy and practice were drawn. I initially compared the two primary schools' transition strategies. I compared strategies used by the two schools and the extent to which they were influenced by policy. This was accomplished by comparing data from policy documents and interviews to what the schools regard as key transition strategies to their schools.

What are the transition strategies deployed by schools and home for Grade 1 learners? This question was part of the exploration of how schools understand and facilitate transitions, and focused mainly on strategies employed by teachers in helping children adjust in the classroom. School principals were interviewed on their understanding of transitions. The principals and members of the school executive committees, such as the School Management Team (SMT), were asked if there were policies in place by the school for dealing with transitions or whether each teacher devised their own strategies for dealing with the situation as it arose.

A semi-structured interview was used with experienced teachers who have worked for a minimum of at least three years in a Grade 1 class, to identify the transition strategies they used and whether these were prescribed by school policy or were their own methods for facilitating adjustments**.** They were also asked about the transition of preschooled children compared with the transition of children who had not attended preschool.

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? This question probes the teachers understanding of the Grade 1 curriculum as a continuum of the Grade R curriculum. Thereafter I compare the curriculum of the Learning Programmes Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills, especially those items that have to do with the adjustment of the child in the class to check if there is continuity in the skills and knowledge emphasised in Grade R.

Teachers in the primary schools were asked about their familiarity with the preschools' environment and philosophies, and if they could discern any continuity between the preschool and what they did in Grade 1. Were the Grade R strategies successful in informing what had to take place in Grade 1?

How do teachers, parents and children understand and articulate transition strategies encountered by Grade 1 learners? This question is linked to the understandings of transition at school level. Through three focus groups interviews consisting of teachers, parents and children only, I discerned how the three groups understand and deal with transitions.

The parent focus group interviewed consisted of the parents of twelve children who were case studies in the two schools. The parents identified the strengths and problems besetting their children that could be ascribed to transition from a preschool or home to a primary school. I asked parents to identify strengths in their children which have largely assisted those children in settling down well in a Grade 1 class. The teachers' focus group consisted of the Grade 1 teachers and other experienced Grade 1 teachers at a school. Children who were part of the case study were also interviewed as to their perception of transitions and how they negotiated them. Interviews were audio-recorded and this provided rich data (not usually obtained through questionnaires) about parents' and children's experiences.

What is the level/degree of adjustment shown by children as they enter Grade 1? Teachers and parents completed the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) instrument which focused on the three adjustment domains of social skills, problem behaviours and academic competence to determine the degree to which children have made adjustments in a new environment.

The context of the study and the sample selection are explained below and their significance in illuminating the research questions is highlighted.

4.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The context of this study was aligned to the nature of the research design. This was a multifaceted study that involved two contexts. The first phase involved policy context and pertained to finding out the position of policies on transitions. A plethora of policies on education exists in South Africa, especially after 1994, the year that marked the birth of the democratic era. This study wanted to find policies that addressed transition and the extent to which the schools incorporated them. Two policies, namely White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (2002), were pertinent to my understanding of how transitions were addressed by the policymakers.

The second phase involved the study of transition strategies in a school and family contexts. Two schools in Province A and Province B from the same socio-economic background were chosen as sites for the research. The two schools were chosen on the recommendation of the district officials and were also used by districts in facilitating training for teachers. Both schools had an intake of children with and without a preschool background. The two schools are situated in the local townships. The schools are fairly resourced with basic teaching and learning resources being available. The school structures are made of brick. In Province B the age of most of the children was five years turning six years during the course of the year, whereas in Province A most of the children were turning seven years of age. The number of

children in class in Province A was forty whereas in Province B was thirty. The low numbers in Province B were unusual for a township school. These low numbers were attributed to the new trend of registering children in the city schools thus rendering township schools almost redundant. Communities around the schools come from a low socio-economic background with a high unemployment rate.

Prior to any data collection process, permission was sought from the district offices in both Province A and Province B. This was followed by the application for permission to conduct the research at the schools identified. Permission was also obtained from the parents of the children who were to be case studies for the research (see Addendum C).

4.4 PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLE SELECTION

Participants in Phase 1 were government and NGO officials. The government officials were a Department of Education (DOE) official responsible for Grade R and a provincial official at district level who was responsible for ECD matters. Two NGO officials who claimed to have been involved in policy formulation were also involved in the study.

Case studies of two schools and twelve children were conducted. The schools (A and B) were situated in Provinces A and B respectively. School principals of the two schools and five teachers in the two schools were the main focus of the study. To gain a better understanding of transition experiences interested participants from neighbouring schools were interviewed such as a primary school principal and a preschool principal with Grade R in their establishment. Twelve children participated in the study with six situated in the Province A school and six in the Province B school. In each school, three of the children had attended preschool and three had not. Of the six children from a school, three were girls and three were boys. Teachers of each class helped select the children according to whether they had attended preschool or not.

Detailed profiles based on the children's learning records starting from preschool education, their family and educational backgrounds, their assessment records and their class-observed performances and interaction with other children were drawn, and used to help select the children**.** The profiles of these children helped me understand their background and how it had an effect on their present conditions. These profiles afforded me as a researcher the chance to become intimate to the children, to know where they come from.

The above scenario is summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Case study groups

	PROVINCE A	**PROVINCE B**
	SCHOOL A	**SCHOOL B**
	CLASSROOM A	**CLASSROOM B**
With preschool	3 learners	3 learners
Without preschool	3 learners	3 learners

Teachers in the classes in which the case studies were situated had three to ten years teaching experience in Grade 1 class. I selected these teachers because of their vast experience in teaching Grade 1. Their experience and knowledge in handling children coming from preschool and home contexts were imperative in understanding how children experience these transitions.

4.5 DATA COLLECTION

The nature of this study and one of its key strengths was the use of a combination of data collection strategies. The research questions and the scope of study determined the data collection strategies that were employed.

The research methodology was both qualitative and quantitative and involved two main phases of data collection.

4.5.1 Phase 1: A survey of national policy position on transition

This survey involved content analysis of policy documents, and interviews with government officials, NGOs and school principals on their understanding of transition matters and how they were being addressed by the official government policies. National policies confirmed the presence or absence of transitions and how to deal with them. This was corroborated by the interviews with government officials, NGOs and school principals. Knowing that transitions were addressed in policies helped in locating their presence and influence in the school policies and their daily running.

Five policy documents were initially reviewed: White Paper No. 1 on Education and Training (1995); the Interim Policy on ECD (1996); White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a); the Revised National Curriculum Statement (2002); and Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Service (2005). The two policy documents which deal directly with transition issues, White Paper No. 5 on ECD and the Revised National Curriculum Statement, were interrogated in more detail and were instrumental in informing the study on the extent to which transitions are addressed.

The Grade 1 and Grade R curricula were compared to find out if there is continuity in terms of skills and knowledge propounded. Interviews were held with the Grade 1 teachers and principals to find out about their understanding and awareness of the Grade R curriculum and what it means to them.

4.5.2 Phase 2: Case studies of two schools and twelve children in Provinces A and B

Phase 2 consisted of four parts.

Part 1 investigated the schools' understandings of transitions. Principals and teachers were interviewed about their understanding of government polices and to identify

strategies employed by the school in helping children make transitions into school. Understanding school policies and their conception of transitions helped to link their presence and influence to the way children negotiated the transitions.

Part 2 investigated parental understandings of transitions and their role in their promotion. Understanding transitions from the perspective of parents informed the study of any contribution made by parents to the children's adjustment and eventual learning in the classroom. Six of the twelve children selected for focused study came straight from home without attending preschool.

Part 3 consisted of interviews with the 12 focus children. These children were interviewed during classroom activities as they interacted with other children and the teacher and during focus group sessions. The children were interviewed to obtain their opinion on how they experienced transitions. Children are individuals and therefore their voices have to be respected. It was imperative that the children's perspective on transitions were acknowledged, as they were the ones who went through the process. The children's perspective and those of the schools and parents were compared to check on any disparities and the reasons for the disparities. The data obtained from children were validated against the data from the schools and parents.

Part 4 looked at children's adjustment to school. The SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) was completed by teachers and by parents of the 12 focus children to identify the social, behavioural and academic skills of these children, and to determine the degree to which children had made or were capable of making good adjustments.

The SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) is a multi-rater instrument that has been norm-referenced using 4000 American children. This scale, which will be explained later, was used to measure children's adjustment in school, and to compare the adjustment of children who had and had not attended preschool.

Section 4.5.3 presents the trajectory of the data collection process explained above.

4.5.3 Survey of national policy position on transitions

4.5.3.1 Document/Policy analysis

A content analysis of official policy documents with provision for transition was conducted to determine the extent to which transitions have been addressed. White Paper No. 1 on Education and Training (1995), the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996), Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Service (2005), White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (2002) were consulted as to the degree to which transition strategies were addressed (see section 4.5.2). White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (2002) were the two key policy documents analysed. The comparison of the Grade 1 and Grade R curricula were conducted .The purpose of policy analysis was to clarify or evaluate the worth of the educational policy in influencing school transition policies. Policy research must contribute towards problem solving and assist in searching for solutions (Sehoole, 2001).

4.5.3.2 Interviews

To identify how officials at the policymaking and implementation level understood the above documents, government, NGO officials and teachers were interviewed. The officials were asked about their roles in the establishment and implementation of the policy provisions.

Interviews are a transaction that takes place between the one seeking and the one supplying information. The participants discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, from their own point of view. Since the data of interviews is not expressed in numerical terms, it therefore affords the interviewer the opportunity to step into the interviewees' shoes, and uses the interviewees' lens to interpret the

world (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000), and "how they regard situations from their own point of view" (2000:267). The interview is therefore not solely aimed at collecting data about life; it is part of life, embedded in life itself. Interviewing as a strategy for data collection it gives us an "opportunity to get to know people quite intimately, so that we can really understand how they feel and think" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:128).

- Interviews with government officials and NGOs

Structured interviews were conducted with government officials at both national and district level and NGOs to record their contribution to and experiences of policy formulations regarding transition strategies.

Firstly, I wanted to know what roles were played by the government officials and NGOs in the drafting of ECD policies, and the extent to which these policies addressed the transitions of children from preschool to Grade 1. I also probed their understanding of the relationship between Grade R and Grade 1, and their perception of how the schools understood and dealt with this dichotomy in service provision. Significant information which was not part of the research project came to the fore regarding the disagreements about the way in which the policy process unfolded.

The NGOs felt left out of the final stages of the formulation of White Paper No. 5 of 2001 and indicated that they could not speak for the contents of the policy. However, they regarded the policy document as an important piece of legislation on ECD in the light of the dearth of any previous policies that could be referred to. The NGOs referred to this policy document as a "flagship" as it was the first policy directive for the development of ECD, an arena which was previously ignored and left to the devices of NGOs and community structures. An NGO official, expressing her discontent at the process of the policy formulation, said that it lacked a significant voice of the people it was supposed to represent, and added:

> "NGOs were involved in the audit for preschools which led to White Paper No. 5-[it] occurred having no consultation as you know, and actually

> against the findings of the audit, of which 80% supported Grade R being in preschools and about 15% in primary schools" (interview with NGO).

At the same time, she expressed her appreciation of the government steps in coming up with significant legislation that elevated the ECD from the doldrums into a position of importance in the national arena. She commented that White Paper No. 5 on ECD of 2001 was better than nothing and that it had actually brought hope that preschool education was being recognised for its importance in laying the foundation for the child's school career.

The NGOs as one of the principal groups of agencies involved in policy making, and also in their day-to-day duties of training and engaging with preschool teachers, brought to the fore their interpretation of transitions and how teachers engaged with these transitions.

These insights of NGOs and government officials were essential for gaining a global overview of the transitions and were fundamental in the analysis of the interviews. Moving into the policy-making context at the government level helped me establish how policy makes provision for transitions and how policy itself is interpreted by government officials, NGOs and school principals. I probed for their knowledge into how the schools accessed these policies and what assistance they received from the government.

- Interviews with teachers and school principals

Teachers were asked on their understanding and awareness of the continuum between Grade R and Grade 1 curricula. The researcher wanted to find out the teachers' understanding and conceptualisation of a child ready to make the transition and how much of this knowledge resonates with the knowledge and skills propounded in the Grade R curriculum.

4.5.4 Understandings and practices of transitions at school and home level

To identify school principals' knowledge of government policy and understandings and practices in relation to transition, structured interviews were conducted. In instances where there were neither documents nor a school policy relating to transitions, teachers were asked about the strategies they used to ensure smooth transition of children into their classrooms.

The interviews with the two principals of the two case study schools in Provinces A and B concerned their perceptions of transition strategies and what informed the strategies. In the case of Province A, the deputy principal was interviewed as the serving school principal had been boarded out due to illness. A new acting principal who was previously a high school teacher had just assumed duties at the school. I was therefore advised to interview the deputy principal, as she was familiar with the running of the school and had better insight into policies pertaining to ECD than the new school principal.

4.5.4.1 Focus group interviews

In-depth focus group interviews were conducted with teachers and parents to find out about their understandings of transitions and what strategies they put in place to help children adjust in a Grade 1 class. Separate focus groups were conducted for teachers and parents in each of the two provinces.

Focus groups are an interview style designed for small groups. Focus group interviews are either "guided or unguided discussions addressing a particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and the researcher" (Berg, 2001:111). In focus group interviews the participants interact with one another rather than the interviewer so that at the end of the session it is the participants agenda that predominates and not that of the interviewer (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000:288). Focus group interviews were preferred over group interviews because the researcher wanted the

participants to interact with one another in deciding on appropriate strategies that underline their understanding of transitions and their role in supporting children to make smooth transitions into school. Interviews are said to be neither subjective nor objective; rather, they are inter-subjective. All the participants expressed their life experiences of the world they live in, in their own peculiar way. Focus groups do have their own limitations in that some participants may choose to remain silent, going down with the whole focus group (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This has been circumvented by probing for more information and by establishing sound rapport with the members of the focus group. Interviews were conducted more than once when not enough information was obtained from the session. This gave the people being interviewed confidence and an opportunity to know the researcher better. The benefit was captured by one parent at a parent focus group interview. He said:

> "When you came in the first time, I could not reply you well as I was not familiar with what was expected of us. I was very happy when you decided to see us for another interview as the first one made me think deeply about my child and how I have helped him cope in Grade 1, as he did not attend preschool due to lack of finances."

- Focus group interviews with school teachers

Focus group interviews were conducted with Grade 1 teachers to capture their perspectives and experiences of transitions alongside that of school principals and parents. Teachers of the focus children were interviewed in separate groups according to the school they taught in.

Teachers are the agency for imparting skills and knowledge to children and they are also the first to receive children as they come from preschool and home. Two interview sessions with the teachers were conducted. Each session lasted not longer than one hour. The second session was used to verify information obtained from the first interview and ensure consistency. Teachers were asked about their knowledge of preschools as the curriculum they taught was supposed to be in a continuum with the preschool curriculum.

- Focus group interviews with parents

Parents were asked about strategies they used to ease the transition process for their children, and how much success was attributable to this. They were asked if they viewed the transition responsibility as their own and that of the school or as the school's alone. Their understanding of the role the school expected them to play was also explored (see Addendum D). Two sessions of parent interviews not lasting for more than one hour were conducted with the two groups of parent focus groups in the two provinces.

Only parents of the twelve focus children were part of the parent focus group. In Province A only three parents of the six case studies attended the first focus group interviews. This group was made up of two fathers or guardians and one mother. The other parents gave excuses that they were working or held up by house chores. The second interview which was held on a Saturday at one of the parents' homes was attended by two parents who did not attend the first session and one father and mother who attended the first interview. The attendance in Province A was much lower than in Province B. In the first interview four parents attended the whole session and the fifth parent came in towards the end of the session. The interviews took place immediately after the school's short break and as the parent was a hawker at a school she could not finish on time to attend the full session of the interviews. The sixth parent could not attend due to the fact that she was at work; however, she invited me to come any time to her home. I later had an interview with her at her home. In the second session only four parents who attended the first session attended. All the parents were mothers. Fathers could not attend due to being at work.

4.5.5 Understandings of transition as lived by children

In the pursuit of understanding transition as lived by children, a number of data collection methods were used, and these were:

- Recording the children's social and behavioural and academic skills by using the SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).
- Interviews.

4.5.5.1 Case studies of two schools involving twelve children

The case studies of two schools involving six children at each school were conducted in Province A and B. Case studies were a preferred method of data collection that provided an opportunity to observe children in their real learning situation. I could report "on the unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors" (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:182). I focused on individual children, and sought to understand their perception of events in which they were involved. The twelve focus children were observed in the classroom by both the teacher and myself as a consultant and these observations were recorded on the SSRS. This afforded me an opportunity to get closer to the participants and reality with a thick description of the unfolding events. Despite the expounded strengths known about case studies, they are not open to cross checking hence they may be selective. The results of case studies may not be generalisable, and they are prone to observer bias (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). I compared my notes with those of the teacher as a way of validating observations and interpretations of critical events before being recorded on the SSRS. However, the results of this study will not be generalised but will only be representative of the selected individuals.

4.5.5.2 Interviewing children

Children's experiences and responses were obtained through interviews employed for obtaining information from children. The objective of the interviews was to determine children's experiences of the preschool or home and their new experiences of the new school. Their thoughts on the most important thing to know that would make

them adjust and learn easily were crucial to understand their long-held perception of the school.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is quite specific about the importance of listening to the child's voice. Interviewing children "assures to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (UNCRC, Article No.12, 1989:18).

By giving children a voice the researcher is accentuating the fact that children represent the human capital i.e. the next generation, and that by controlling children adults are trying to control the future-a land where the children will eventually be in control despite adults' best efforts (Prout & James, 1997).

This study is underpinned by the view that children are not mere reflections of adults' prisms through which to see adulthood and adult-led institutions, but are social actors in their own right. Here children's multiple interactions and the ways in which children make sense of these become the focus of interest without requiring any recourse to adult perspectives (Prout & James, 1997). The researcher, in the course of interviewing both parents and teachers, identified a void in which children's voices were absent. To redress this I embarked on group interviews with children that recognised the children's voices as representing their sole view and not as representing the adult's voice. In group interviews the potential exists that discussions may develop, thus yielding a wide range of responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

The question that has been uppermost in research concerning children is about the age permissible for participation in research studies. Is there a definite age at which children are able to consider fully the implications of participation? Definitions of competence may be particularly contentious when children or young people are involved. Regardless of the legal debates, lack of competence does not remove the

right to express a view. There is unlikely to be a blanket answer in terms of children's ages concerning when competence as research participants can be assumed (Coad & Lewis, 2004). The problem of interviewing children, especially those coming from poor socio-economic backgrounds, is compounded by the fact that the context in which they grow is inhibiting, in the sense that parents may still regard themselves as the mouthpiece of children (Moletsane, 2004). This kind of scenario presupposes that it would be difficult to get children talking, the more so to somebody they do not know. This problem was resolved by conducting the interview with the children towards the end of my three-month research at the school. By that time I had already established closer relationships with the children, and they knew me well. Each time I entered the class, they would offer to read to me to show me how proficient they had grown in their reading skills.

4.5.5.3 Adjustment to school

The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) was used to identify the level or degree of children's adjustments in Grade 1 class. The SSRS is a norm-referenced instrument in the United States of America with a list of criteria for good and poor adjustments in the classroom. The rating scale was employed due to its reliability in assessing children's adjustment and the lack of such an instrument suited to the context of South Africa. While the lack of an instrument for assessing adjustment in South Africa is acknowledged, further studies could investigate reliability of the measures in the SSRS and identify other indicators suitable to a developing country context.

- Teacher and parent rating forms

The SSRS Elementary Forms for parents and teachers were used to gather data. Data were gathered through observations of children by the teacher and myself in an advisory capacity in the class by using the SSRS instrument to rate children's adjustment. The SSRS Elementary parent version was also used by parents at home to record the frequency and importance of social skills and behavioural problems.

First I explained the rating scale item by item to parents before they took it home, to ensure that all participants had similar understanding of the items in the rating scale. In the case of parents who could not read English I organised separate meetings with them whereby a literate member of the family was invited to be present. The rating scale was explained to such family members, but it was emphasised that the responsibility for completing these rating scales were the parents'.

This rating scale also has a student version for completion by the student him/herself. It is recommended that children from Grade 3 and upwards can be in a position to complete the rating scales. However, since this study was conducted at the beginning of the year in which the children entered Grade 1, the student rating scales were not used.

The SSRS was norm-referenced with some 4000 students in the USA. It is used to identify students at risk for social difficulties and poor academic performance, selecting behaviours for school and home intervention and categorising behavioural difficulties as either performance or acquisition deficits while identifying social behavioural strengths (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The SSRS is divided into three main domains, i.e. social skills, problem behaviours and academic skill. Social skills and problem behaviours are said to be closely related to how the child learns in the classroom, and may interfere with the academic performance of a child with low levels of Social Skills and High levels of Problem Behaviours (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

The Social Skills domain of the SSRS elementary consists of four subscales:

- Cooperation: In this sub-domain scale behaviours such as sharing materials, and compliance with rules and directions are addressed.

- Assertion: This sub-domain scale deals with behaviours such as initiating activities and friendships, asking for information, introducing oneself.

- Responsibility: This sub-domain scale deals with behaviours that show regard for property or work.

- Self-control: Behaviours that emerge in a conflict situation are addressed. For example, does the child act appropriately when being teased?

The subscales of the Social Skills have ten items each in both the teachers and the parents form. The subscale of Responsibility is only available on the parent form. This subscale too has ten items.

The Social Skills Scale of the SSRS uses two types of ratings, namely frequency and importance. Frequency ratings reflect the “how often” key which denotes the frequency of the behaviour. These are denoted as; “Never”, “Sometimes”, or ”Very often”. These ratings appear in both the teacher and the parent forms. The frequency and importance of these behaviours are defined in terms of their importance in the classroom interactions with children, or at home in terms of relationships with the child. Both the frequency and the importance ratings were used for the purpose of this study.

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 present items in the Social Skill Domain subscales of the Parent and the Teacher Rating Scales.

Table 4.2: Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Elementary Level): Parent Form subscale items

Item	Cooperation
1	Uses free time in an acceptable way
2	Keeps room clean and neat without being reminded
11	Congratulates family members on accomplishments
15	Puts away toys and other household items
16	Volunteers to help family members with tasks
19	Helps you with household tasks without being asked
21	Attempts household tasks before asking for your help
27	Gives compliments to friends or other children in the family
28	Completes household tasks within a reasonable time
33	Uses time appropriately while waiting for your help with homework or some other task
	Assertion
4	Joins group activities without being told to
10	Invites other to your home
12	Makes friends easily
13	Shows interest in a variety of things
23	Is liked by others
24	Starts conversations rather than waiting for others to talk first
30	Is self-confident in social situations such as parties or group outings
34	Accepts friends' ideas for playing
35	Easily changes form one activity to another
38	Reports accidents to appropriate persons
	Responsibility
5	Introduces herself or himself to new people without being told
7	Asks sales clerks for information or assistance
8	Attends to speakers at meetings such as in church of youth groups
9	Politely refuses unreasonable requests from others
18	Answers the phone appropriately
20	Appropriately questions household rules that may be unfair
29	Asks permission before using another family member's property
31	Requests permission before leaving the house
37	Acknowledges compliments or praise from friends
38	Reports accidents to appropriate persons
	Self-control
3	Speaks in an appropriate tone of voice at home
6	Responds appropriately when hit or pushed by other children
9	Politely refuses unreasonable requests from others
14	Avoids situations that are likely to result in trouble
17	Receives criticism well
22	Controls temper when arguing with other children
25	Ends disagreements with you calmly
26	Controls temper in conflict situations with you
32	Responds appropriately to teasing from friends or relatives of his or her own age
36	Cooperates with family members without being asked to do so

(Source: Margetts, 2002)

Table 4.3: Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Elementary Level): Teacher Form subscale items

Item	Cooperation
8	Uses free time in an acceptable way
9	Finishes class assignments within time limits
15	Uses time appropriately while waiting for help
16	Produces correct schoolwork
20	Follows your directions
21	Puts work materials or school property away
26	Ignores peer distractions when doing class work
27	Keeps desk clean and neat without being reminded
28	Attends to your instructions
29	Easily makes transition from one classroom activity to another

Item	Assertion
2	Introduces herself or himself to new people without being told
3	Appropriately questions rules that may be unfair
6	Says nice things about himself or herself when appropriate
7	Invites others to join in activities
10	Makes friends easily
14	Initiates conversations with peers
17	Appropriately tells you when he or she thinks you have treated him or her unfairly
19	Gives compliments to peers
23	Volunteers to help peers with classroom tasks
24	Join ongoing activity or group without being told to do so

Item	Self-control
1	Controls temper in conflict situations with peers
4	Compromises in conflict situations by changing own ideas to reach agreement
5	Responds appropriately to peer pressure
11	Responds appropriately to teasing by peers
12	Controls temper in conflict situations with adults
13	Receives criticism well
18	Accepts peer's ideas for group activities
22	Cooperates with peers without prompting
25	Responds appropriately when pushed or hit by other children
30	Gets along with people who are different

(Source: Margetts, 2002)

- Problem Behaviour Domain

The Problem Behaviour Domain scale includes subscales measuring externalising problems, internalising problems and hyperactivity:

- Externalising behaviours: These are behaviours indicating physical aggression and poor control of temper.
- Internalising behaviours: Behaviours indicating poor self-esteem, loneliness, anxiety and temper.
- Hyperactivity: Behaviours such as excessive movement and fidgeting.

The subscale items of the Problem Behaviour Domain are presented in Table 4.4 for the Parent Form and Table 4.5 for the Teacher Form.

Table 4.4: Problem Behaviour Domain Subscales: Parent Form

Item	Externalising behaviour
39	Fights with others
43	Threatens or bullies others
46	Argues with others
49	Talks back to adults when corrected
54	Gets angry easily
55	Has temper tantrums

	Internalising behaviour
40	Acts sad or depressed
41	Appears lonely
42	Has low self-esteem
45	Shows anxiety about being with a group of children
52	Is easily embarrassed
53	Is easily distracted

	Hyperactivity
44	Disturbs ongoing activities
47	Fidgets and moves excessively
48	Disobeys rules or requests
50	Acts impulsively
51	Doesn't listen to what others say
53	Is easily distracted

(Source: Margetts, 2002)

Table 4.5: Problem Behaviour Domain Subscales: Teacher Form

SSRS Item	Externalising behaviour
31	Fights with others
33	Threatens or bullies others
41	Argues with others
42	Talks back to adults when corrected
43	Gets angry easily
44	Has temper tantrums

	Internalising behaviour
32	Has low self-esteem
34	Appears lonely
38	Shows anxiety about being with a group of children
39	Is easily embarrassed
45	Likes to be alone
46	Acts sad or depressed

	Hyperactivity
35	Is easily distracted
36	Interrupts conversations of others
37	Disturbs ongoing activities
40	Doesn't listen to what others say
47	Acts impulsively
48	Fidgets and moves excessively

(Source: Margetts, 2002)

Each of the subscales of the Problem Behaviours has six items each in both the parent and the teacher's form. The Problem Behaviour Scale of the SSRS uses only one type of ratings, namely frequency. The frequency ratings reflect the "how often" key which denotes the frequency of the behaviour. These are denoted as; "Never", "Sometimes" or "Very often". These ratings appear in both the teacher and the parent forms.

- The Academic Competence Scale

The Academic Competence Domain scale rates the student's academic performance and parent involvement in relation to other children in the class. This domain consists of items rated on a 5-point scale, representing performance in the following way.

The Academic Competence Scale is represented in Table 4.6

Table 4.6: The Academic Competence Scale

Item	Descriptor	Lowest 10%	Next Lowest 20%	Middle 40%	Next Highest 20%	Highest 10%
49.	Compared with other children in my classroom, the **overall academic performance** of this child is:	1	2	3	4	5
50.	In **reading**, how does this child compare with other students?	1	2	3	4	5
51	In **mathematics**, how does this child compare with other students?	1	2	3	4	5
52.	In terms of grade-level expectations, this child's skills in **reading** are:	1	2	3	4	5
53.	In terms of grade-level expectations, this child's skills in **mathematics** are:	1	2	3	4	5
54.	This child's **overall motivation** to succeed academically is:	1	2	3	4	5
55.	This child's **parental encouragement** to succeed academically is:	1	2	3	4	5
56.	Compare with other children in my classroom this child's' **intellectual functioning** is:	1	2	3	4	5
57.	Compared with other children in my classroom this child's **overall classroom behaviour** is:	1	2	3	4	5

The SSRS, like other social behaviour rating scales, is influenced by a number of factors:

- Social behaviours are evaluative judgements influenced and shaped by the environment and a rater's standard for behaviour. Two raters may rate the same behaviour differently depending on the standards they attach to such behaviour. To circumvent this limitation in the rating system, a multiple-rater system was employed in the use of the SSRS, i.e. both parents and teachers.

A clearer and more comprehensive picture of a child may be gleaned from two or more raters than from a single rater (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

- Many social behaviours are situationally specific, and rating scales use rather simple frequency response categories that vary widely in as far as their intensity and duration is concerned. The more varied the raters and perceived behaviours, the more one would know about a child from different raters in different settings (Gresham and Elliott, 1990).

- The researcher has no way of knowing whether the respondent might have wished to add any other comments about the issue under investigation. Sometimes there are more pressing issues that need to be clarified in order to give better meaning to the issue under investigation, but respondents are silenced for a single category needed in a rating scale (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). To avoid this, I interviewed parents and teachers to add more insight into the data obtained by the rating scales.

4.6 PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

There were factors that limited access to a wide and thick data in this study. As I was an outsider to the school environment, it was initially difficult for children to open up and give detailed information as they viewed me as a stranger. Initially, the information obtained from the children was not as detailed as required, so subtle probing and prompting techniques were employed to get the desired data. I also had to prolong my stay at school to become familiar with the children and they with me. I had to build a good rapport with the teachers and parents to establish a sound relationship of trust before any interviewing process could be carried out.

Through some informal conversations with teachers, I was made aware of the reluctance of some parents to be involved in the education of their children. I was prepared and ready that I might not get an overwhelming response of parents to be part of the study. I was ready to go out of my way and follow up parents in their

homes to obtain the data necessary for this study. These parents gave as reason for the inability to attend school meetings a lack of time due to looking after younger siblings at home or because they were working and were therefore unavailable during the week (Interviews with parents).

Teachers and parents recorded the children's social and behavioural competences on the SSRS rating scale. This was done after I had discussed the rating scale items with them and have ensured that all have the same understanding of them.

The use of generic rating scales across countries and cultural groups can fail to recognise that some of the items may be culturally inappropriate and that many adjustment skills and behaviours are acceptable within certain contexts and not necessarily to others (Margetts, 2000).

4.6.1 Home variables

A number of variables exist on the home and school front that affected how the research was conducted and how the results were analysed. Both parents and teachers doubted their abilities to use the rating scale as they had never used one before. Using the rating scale was even more scary and intimidating.

Parents claimed that it was the first time that they had been called upon to participate in a research project and they felt unsure and uneasy about this. For the first time in their lives, the parents were required to take a critical look at their children's social and behavioural skills and be objective about the findings. Parents were unsettled and unsure on how to use the rating scale.

Since parents invited me to come and visit them, I took this as an opportunity to visit their homes and ask about the progress on the rating scale.

Social and behavioural skills are always situated in and determined by the values and norms of a particular cultural group. Social and behavioural skills of the one cultural group may not necessarily be held in high esteem by another. This factor was also considered and it influenced the interpretation of the findings.

4.6.2 School variables

Teachers claimed that this was the first time they were involved in a research project and in using the rating scale for assessing social and behavioural skills. Use of rating scales is not foreign to teachers-the RNCS expects them to employ it from time to time using the outcomes provided. However, keeping an eye on six individuals in the class was an enormous responsibility for teachers who were not used to keeping to such a schedule.

My visit to the class was an opportunity for the teachers to air their grievances about a number of issues, including the RNCS training. Teachers did not take kindly to doing extra work on top of what they were already doing. I had to be careful about the way in which I persuaded the teachers to observe children and make informed marking of the rating scale.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Data from policy documents were correlated with their relevancy in addressing transition strategies- hence only two policy documents were relevant and basic to this study. My data analysis was guided by what has been expounded in literature as transition strategies. In analysing policy documents I looked at the extent to which policy dealt with the adjustment of a child at school. I checked for the word transition in the documents but seemingly the word is not commonly used-hence it appeared very few times. In my analysis I was guided by what literature on transitions expounds as good or poor transition strategies. I looked for the emphasis on the development of social and emotional skills in preschool children and how much does it appear in the

documents. This data was aligned to information gleaned from interviews with government officials, NGOs and concerning their knowledge of policy position on transitions.

The interview data from the government and NGO officials, school principals, teachers, parents and children were transcribed and emergent topics, themes and issues related to transition and the research questions were identified. These topics, themes and issues arrived at were confirmed or disconfirmed against the existing knowledge base on transition experiences expounded by literature. Emergent themes and topics have been analysed by comparing and grouping them according to the relevant categories to explore any similarities or differences in the interviewees' experiences of transitions. The data was also analysed and linked to the research questions to show that the data was generated to speak to the questions. In Chapter Five, the relationship between the data and the questions will be highlighted.

In analysing data I made conclusions that highlighted the extent of the participation of parents in their children's education, the un/preparedness of the Grade 1 class teacher in dealing with transition problems, the extent to which preschools were instrumental in preparing children for entrance into Grade 1, and the level at which official policy was integrated into the schools' transition policies.

- The analysis of the SSRS

Every child's score on the SSRS and the frequency in which all the items mentioned under the social skills and its subscales of empathy, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, and self-control appeared, and their overall score were summed to determine in which of the subscales the child showed strong tendencies. Each child's sub-domain raw scores were summed and domain raw scores tallied

The analysis of the rating scale is arranged as follows: The analysis of ratings on the social skills and behavioural skills by the teacher and parent on children in each of the

two provinces, including the comparison of preschooled children with the home schooled children.

The ratings by teachers and parents were compared across the provinces in relation to the importance of social skills and the behavioural skills at school. An analysis of teacher ratings in each province on the academic competence of both preschooled and home children was made.

The analysis helped expose the adjustment capabilities of preschooled children as against home children. It also revealed differences and commonalities in both the teacher's and the parent ratings, and ratings of both teachers and parents across provinces.

4.8 DEALING WITH VALIDITY

The data collection process was carried out according to the research design developed for this study. There were some exceptional occasions when adjustments and changes were needed to ensure that the research included all the subtle details deemed important to provide a global picture of transitions.

During the study, it became evident that there were some areas of importance that were not covered in my initial research design and that were important for a comprehensive understanding of the transition process. Each step was documented to give a full picture of the trajectory taken in collecting data. Every effort was made to deviate as little as possible from the initial research design and plan.

Ensuring valid knowledge in a qualitative research study is a standard practice, more than in quantitative research where validity and reliability are accounted for from the start of the research process. Purposeful sampling was used to arrive at sites that fitted the purpose of the study.

The results of the study are probably not generalisable for all situations, but will be valuable in understanding the effectiveness of transition strategies deployed by some schools experiencing transition problems to the same degree, and also for sites with similar situations. The results can be used to understand how transition can be facilitated in order to avoid problems manifesting in learning.

The SSRS rating scale was deployed to record children's social, behavioural and academic skills. This tool has been used in previous research (Margetts, 1997; 2000; 2002) and the domains of this scale were identified in relation to school adjustments as valid set of indicators for measuring school adjustments (Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Margetts, 2000).

To ensure that the data collection was valid, the procedures outlined in Table 4.7 were implemented.

Table 4.7: Ensuring the validity and reliability of the study

STRATEGY	APPROACH
▪ Piloting	• I piloted my research tools in November 2004 in the two schools where I have conducted my research. I wanted to find out if the participants would be in a position to use the rating scale as it was meant to. The results arrived at have indicated the extent to which the research tools employed have produced reliable and valid results. Misunderstandings involving the interpretation of items on the rating scale were brought forward and discussed with both parents and teachers. The completed rating scales were brought to the researcher after one month and were analysed manually. The results were not conclusive, but however they showed preschooled children to be having an edge over home children as far as adjustments in class were concerned. The reason might have been that the piloting took place at the end of the year when a lot of support has been afforded children. The results of this pilot study however do not form part of my study.
▪ Recorded data	• I audio-taped all my interviews with the focus groups. I asked for permission to sit in the classroom, observe and interview children in their daily tasks and in their interactions with one another and with the teacher, and take field notes on those important moments that might escape my memory.
▪ Member checks	• I asked some of the interviewees to check data informally for accuracy. I even had a second round of interviews for parents and teachers to confirm or reject some of the information obtained in the first round.

4.9 DEALING WITH ETHICAL CONCERNS

I applied for permission from the Departments of Education in both Province A and B, as well as from the school authorities and the parents of the children before any study could proceed. I also asked permission from all participants in this study to interview and involve them in the study. A high level of confidentiality was maintained on the information obtained, especially from government officials, NGOs, parents and teachers, and in transcribing the interviews pseudonyms were used to conceal the sources of the information obtained as the interviewees desired.

Interviewing children raises various ethical issues, such as the dilemma of imposing one's own will upon children with the result that they echo one's views instead of

theirs. I dealt with this by giving access to my interview transcriptions to those parents and teachers who wanted to see them, to check whether I have misrepresented them or not.

4.9.1 Redressing the imbalance: researcher-child relationship

Research which involves children is often viewed with contempt-as the child is often seen as echoing the researcher's views and not necessarily his/her own (Coad & Lewis, 2004). To prevent the research study from falling into this trap, the researcher took the following steps to ensure that children felt comfortable and not threatened:

- Children were interviewed and observed in their own school with which they are quite familiar. Even if schools are sometimes viewed as being adult-led, they are nevertheless also neutral ground where a sense of community reigns amongst all who belong to it.

- Permission was sought from parents and children themselves to interview and observe them. Coad and Lewis (2004) postulate the idea of researchers having gatekeepers (such as parents or teachers) when interviewing children other than their own. However, this has its own demerits in that children will feel obliged to echo what will go down well with the gatekeeper instead of expressing their own opinion. I deviated from this route by interviewing children in the absence of parents and teachers. In order to set the parents and teachers at ease, they were informed beforehand about the content of the interview, and offered the interview schedules if they wanted to have a look at them.

- The research accordingly served my own needs and those of the children. A follow-up programme with the schools is going to be developed and this will pave the way for an introduction of a transition programme in the two schools to facilitate the adaptation of children into the school environment.

- No research is value-free and the potential for bias in child-centred research has been well documented. Inevitably, the researcher's value will have an impact on the relationship with child participants. The research was therefore guided by principles of authenticity, credibility and trustworthiness to ensure that the child's integrity was respected. The research environment ensured that the child's voice truly represented his/her own views, that it was believable (not echoing other people's voices), and that what she/he said represented what she/he believed in. The researcher was always aware that children's cognitive capabilities interact with their memory and emotions. A child at one point may play down her/his views and in another situation exaggerate them (Coad & Lewis, 2004). I had to interview children twice to ensure some constancy in their views.

- Focus group interviews instead of one-on-one interviews have been used. It is advisable to use group interviews with small children rather than one-on-one interviews. If one is aiming at a richer and broader range of responses, a less intimidating context than in individual interviews, and the value of debate between participants in clarifying understanding and generating new ideas, then the group interview is ideal.

4.10 CONCLUSION

The interpretive paradigm on which this study is based, predisposed the research to a rich array of qualitative data which necessitated the use of multiple data analysis tools. The research was intense, with some hiccups in between, but at the end of the day it was deeply satisfying. It was in almost all instances informed by the theories espoused by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of the interaction of variables in the environment at different intervals that shape the transitions of children which are impacted and impact upon the social and emotional make-up of the child and the environment the child is transiting to.

Chapter Five deals with the analysis of interviews with the teachers, parents, school principals, government officials and NGOs. The interrogation of policy documents will be reported first, and an outline of what they espouse as transition strategies will be put to the fore. This will be compared and contrasted to what the interviewees said their understanding of transition was, and how the practice was related to policy.