A STUDY OF TRANSITION FROM PRESCHOOL AND HOME CONTEXTS TO GRADE 1 IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

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A STUDY OF TRANSITION FROM PRESCHOOL AND HOME CONTEXTS TO GRADE 1 IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

by

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DECLARATION

I, N.C. Phatudi (Student number 23315718), declare that:

"A study of transition from preschool and home
contexts to Grade 1 in a developing country"

Is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. This thesis was not previously submitted by me for any degree at another university.

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF TRANSITION FROM PRESCHOOL OR HOME CONTEXTS TO GRADE 1 IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

The introduction of Grade R (Reception Year) and its curriculum in early childhood education has been a key policy initiative, but despite the importance of this level of education the demands of the transition from Grade R to Grade 1 are not explicitly discussed. Official documents note the likely difficulties and challenges inherent in the transition of children from preschool and home into the primary school environment but they do not explicitly say how these difficulties can be dealt with.

This study investigated the implementation of transition policy and existing practices for children transiting from preschool or the home into Grade 1 in South Africa's schools. A case study of two purposively selected schools, from two different provinces, explored the impact of transition on both children's adjustment to their new environment and the school itself. Key policy documents were initially analysed, and key informants in government and non governmental organisations (NGOs) were interviewed in relation to aspects of the policy guidelines and practices for transition to school. Participating principals, teachers, parents and children as subjects were interviewed to identify their perspectives about transition and how they deal with it.

The social, behavioural and academic adjustment of 6 children from each of the two schools was investigated using the Social Skills Rating Scale (SSRS). The results show that although some differences in the adjustment of children between the two case study schools were noted, it appeared that preschooled children were more likely to make better adjustments than non-preschooled (home) children. The study also revealed that schools' strategies for dealing with transitions are not informed by the government's transition policies and guidelines. Instead, the two schools devised their own in-house strategies to deal with transitions and these differed from one school to another.

The study also highlights that teachers are not familiar with policies governing their working lives. The schools studied also lamented the lack of continuity in the curricula and the way of life between the school and preschool despite policies enacted to deal with this disjuncture. Whilst the findings show a disparity between the adjustments of preschooled children and their home counterparts a longitudinal study involving more case schools would provide greater insight into preschool grade 1 transition in a developing South Africa.

The educational and policy implications of the study are discussed with regard to important processes and structures put in place for the transition process of children entering into primary schools.

While case study findings cannot be generalised the results can be beneficial in informing other similar contexts grappling with transitions. The study highlights important processes undertaken in the adjustment of children into primary schools, however it also revealed some shortcomings which have serious implications for policy and practice. "Policy literacy" should be embarked upon to familiarise teachers as end users with what policy entails. Every school should have a transition programme that would help orientate and settle in the new entrants into the school environment.

Key Words: Transition, preschools, primary schools, policy position, social skills, adaptive behaviours, NGOs, disadvantaged contexts, developed world, home.

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Last but not least, it was the mercy of the Almighty Lord, which sustained me throughout my studies. Praise be to Him!

DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to my deceased parents, Pampu Phillemon Phaladi and Monakwe Mirriam Bessie Phaladi, for their unlimited and nurturing love, care and for being role models of what a fulfilled life is. To my father in particular, who at the age of fifteen started this long journey of acquiring knowledge and education. His strong will power and dedication to succeed against all adversity made him a role model fit to be emulated.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DOE	–	Department of Education (government)
ECD	–	Early Childhood Development
ECE	–	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	–	Early Childhood Education Centres
Grade 1	–	The first grade of formal schooling
Grade R	–	Reception year class before formal schooling
NAEYC	–	National Association for Education of Young Children
NEPI	–	National Education Policy Investigation
NGO	–	Non-governmental organisation
NCS	–	National Curriculum Statement
RNCS	–	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SSRS	–	Social Skills Rating System
USA	–	United States of America
SA	–	South Africa

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.

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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.

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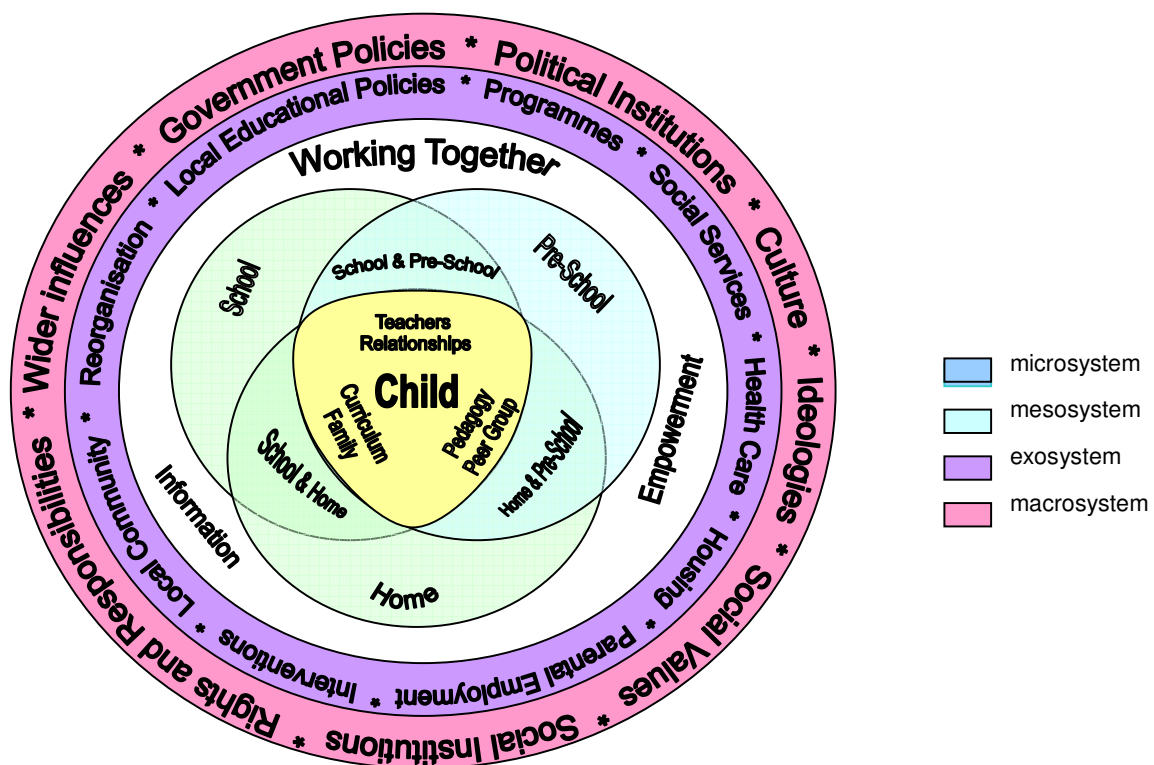
Figure 3.1: Four levels of transition settings (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002:151)

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).

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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Emotional and social well-being         │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                         ↕
┌─────────────┐   ┌─────────────┐   ┌─────────────┐
│ induction   │   │ separation  │   │ incorporation│
│ rites of    │ → │ links       │ → │ acculturation│
│ passage     │   │ transition  │   │ identity    │
│ preparation │   │             │   │             │
└─────────────┘   └─────────────┘   └─────────────┘
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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                    Values                          │
│                attitudes and                       │
│                   culture                          │
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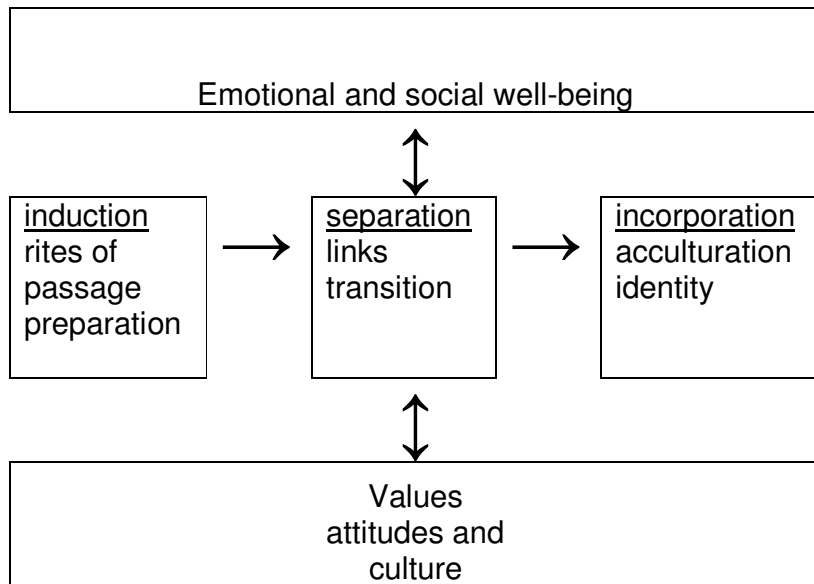
Figure 3.2: Processes of transition to school (adapted from Fabian, 2000:144)

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

Item	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

Item	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.

CHAPTER 5

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF TRANSITIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four explained and described the research undertaken, the sampling procedure used, the research tools employed in the data collection and the voices of those people who participated in the study which ranged from government officials, NGOs, school principals and teachers to parents and children.

The context of this study as already explained is underlined by children who move from home into school without any form of intervention that would prepare them for the eventuality of participating meaningfully in learning and those who move from some form of care or preschool to school. The research was undertaken within a theoretical framework that has evolved through research based in affluent Western societies such as United Kingdom, Denmark, Australia and Iceland. The aim of this chapter is to identify the policies that address transitions and to reveal the differences and similarities in roles and perspectives of government and NGO officials, school principals, teachers, parents and children who shape transitions in a developing South Africa in supporting those transitions. The findings are based on policy analysis, interviews, and fieldwork observations and extract meanings and relationships that may lead to a generalised understanding on how the elements shaping the transition of children interact with one another.

5.2 EMERGENT FINDINGS

This chapter provides a detailed exposition of the findings from different principal stakeholders who are involved in or have influence on the transition of children to

school. Since I used a combination of data collection methods, I will first describe the presence of transitions in policies and the extent of their influence on practices in preschools and primary schools. According to Darling-Hammond (1998), policies are not necessarily implemented as conceived but are reinvented at each level of the system. What happens in the classroom is not always the intention of the policymaker, but flows from the knowledge and beliefs that operate within local contexts.

The reference to transition in government policies was both confirmed and denied by arguments put forth by the government officials and NGOs. The views of the NGOs who had been involved in shaping the ECD landscape in South Africa through their involvement in the NEPI (1992) policy initiatives that influenced the course that education as a means of distribution and balance of power assumed, were crucial in understanding policy thinking and its influence in transforming ECD. One NGO had this to say about her involvement in NEPI and the different arguments reigning with regard to the reception class:

> "I was the first person probably in print to have said we should have a universal reception year class-so that was very interesting. We had too terrible sorts of doubts about whether putting Grade R in schools is a good thing and how to be managed and I suppose one still has those doubts" (NGO).

5.3   POLICY ANALYSIS ON PROVISION FOR TRANSITIONS

Key policy documents listed below found to be relevant to the study were analysed as to their appropriateness in addressing transition issues. Table 5.1 provides a summary of policies that were consulted and found to have supported the move towards the establishment of Reception Grade for bridging the educational gap between home and school. The key features of the policies are indicated.

Table 5.1: Policy documents and key features

POLICY	KEY FEATURE/S
White Paper No. 1 on Education and Training (DOE, 1995)	Instrumental in giving recognition to the importance of ECD as a foundation for a successful school career. It also paved the way for the introduction of the Interim Policy on ECD.
Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (DOE, 1996)	Gave rise to the launching of a three-year National Reception Year Pilot Programme. The aim was to pilot a one-year public provisioning of the Reception Year in disadvantaged areas.
Nationwide Audit of ECD Provisioning in South Africa (DOE, 2001)	Gave key knowledge into the provisioning of ECD in terms of sites, the practitioners and their qualifications and the accessibility of these sites/centres to children.
White Paper No. 5 on ECD (DOE, 2001)	Instrumental in paving the way for the establishment of Grade R with a National Curriculum that would help to bring about coherency in education provision for all sectors of the population.
Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (DOE, 2002).	Curriculum statement divided into Learning Areas. The curriculum for Grade R has three Learning Programmes of literacy, numeracy and life skills. The curriculum is outcomes-based instead of being content-based.
Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Service (Department of Social Development, 2005)	Comprehensive guidelines on facilities, resources, health care, environmental safety and policies on young children.

For the purpose of this study only two policies, namely White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS, 2002), were analysed in detail. These policies evolved from White Paper No. 1 on Education and Training (DOE, 1995) which was crucial in acknowledging the importance of a bridging class, and are therefore fundamental in the establishment of Grade R and its curriculum.

The following question was instrumental in understanding the policy provision on transitions and the rationale behind their enactment, how they are understood and applied by the users:

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

The policy documents were analysed, and government, NGO officials and schools were interviewed to identify:

- the extent to which policies addressed the transitions;
- the effect of policies on practice-how policies are being understood and applied by users;
- measures put in place to ensure that policies are being implemented.

5.3.1 The extent to which policies address transitions

Early childhood policy documents were reviewed to find the extent to which transitions are addressed. White Paper No. 1 on Education and Training (1995) was the first piece of legislation that was passed after the dawn of the new democratic South Africa in 1994. It became a precursor to all other legislation that followed. It actually laid a foundation for all other policies on education.

White Paper No. 1 on Education and Training (DOE, 1995) highlighted the importance of continuity between home, educare and preschool phases and the early years of schooling, so that the introduction to formal learning should not be abrupt. This earlier policy on education laid a foundation on which future policies on early education were built. The Interim Policy for ECD (DOE, 1996) was

proclaimed with the sole purpose of piloting a public provisioning of the Reception Year (Grade R) in disadvantaged areas. The Reception Year is a bridging class between preschool and primary school. The aim of establishing this class is to address the problem besetting children who had no preschool education of being unready to benefit from formal learning.

The piloting of the Reception year class led to White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a) which became a mouthpiece for the nurturance and growth of Early Childhood Development. White Paper No. 5 on ECD was instrumental in acknowledging the importance of transitions through the establishment of a national system of provision of the Reception Year (Grade R) for children aged 5 years. Amongst its most important aims in combating problems related to learning are to:

- improve "the skills and attitudes of children required for successful learning and development-thus reducing their chances of failure" (DOE, 2001a: 6);

- reduce "underage and under-prepared learners, who have proven to be most at risk in terms of school failure and drop-out" (DOE, 2001a:6);

- "advance the rights of children" (DOE, 2001a:6), as derived from the South African Constitution of 1996.

The White paper No.5 on ECD policy is based on the premise that intervention in the earliest years would help reduce the social and economic disparities and race and gender inequalities. It would mainly be children from the poor and rural schools who would benefit from this kind of intervention (DOE, 2001a).

The aims expounded above were to be realised and embedded in a national outcomes based curriculum in different Learning Areas which for the lower classes have been clustered into Learning Programmes (DOE, 2002). Three Learning

Programmes, viz. Numeracy, Literacy and Life Skills, are the core areas of learning for both Grade R and the Foundation Phase (Grades 1-3) (DOE, 2002).

White Paper No. 5 on ECD articulated varied reasons for the establishment of Grade R; foremost amongst them were:

- to bridge the inequality of provision of ECD;
- to bridge the inequality of access to ECD services;
- to put an end to the fragmented legislative and policy framework that resulted in uncoordinated service delivery (DOE, 2001a).

In order to address the above factors, a regulated policy framework was needed that could promote the overall development of children who would be ready to go into Grade 1 with minimal adjustment problems. Grade R which was declared compulsory became a necessity especially since school-readiness tests were outlawed and no child could be refused entry into school due to the inability of a child to pass such tests

School readiness has been associated with the mastery of certain skills imperative for a smooth transition. Moreover, if readiness consists of mastery of simpler skills that permit a person to reach higher or more complex skills, one child's readiness may be another child's long-ago accomplishment or another child's yet-to-be-achieved success. Whenever readiness is defined in terms of a specific level of accomplishment, children who have not had similar life experiences or opportunities for learning are being omitted from this definition (Pianta & Cox, 1999). This implies that children may be ready to learn but because they do not possess certain prerequisite skills they are simply classified as not being ready. Accordingly what would happen to a large number of children who would be excluded if the criteria for school readiness are based on certain knowledge and acquisition of skills? The establishment of Grade R was to rectify the situation by focussing on the overall

development of the child that would put him/her in a favourable position in learning optimally in a formal context.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RCNS) (DOE, 2002) as an official curriculum document for Grade R to Grade 9 gives an exposition of the outcomes to be realised in each year of study, including skills and attitudes embedded in the content. The outcomes for Grade R are aimed at equipping the child with skills necessary for dealing with formal Numeracy, Literacy and Life Skills. For the purpose of this study I am going to focus on the three Learning programmes namely, Numeracy, Literacy, Life Skills and in particular on the Learning Area (LA): Life Orientation (LO) which concerns itself with the meaningful adaptation of the child in a new context. According to the RNCS, the LO is aimed at "equipping learners to live productive and meaningful lives in a transforming society-their focus is the development of the self-in-society" (DOE, 2002: 176). This Learning Area deals with social and emotional development, the two areas lauded in the literature as imperative to develop and enhance for good adjustments to take place

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) has become a tool which enables teachers and practitioners in preschools to develop and stimulate children's skills, such as pre-literacy, numeracy, emotional and social skills and knowledge and their overall development that would enable them to participate meaningfully in learning. According to the RNCS, the emphasis on the continuity of content from Grade R to Grade 1 is highlighted. Learning Outcome 3, Assessment Standard 6 of the LA Mathematics states as follows for Grade R:

> "Follows directions (alone and/or as a member of a group or team) to move or place self within the classroom (e.g. 'at the front' or 'at the back')" (DOE, 2002)

The Learning Area Mathematics: Learning Outcome 3 and Assessment Standard (AS) 6 in Grade 1 reads as follows:

"Follows directions (alone and/or as a member of a group or team) to move or place self within the classroom or three dimensional objects in relation to each other" (DOE, 2002).

The AS shows some consistency and continuity with the progression in terms of difficulty of content in Grade 1.

Table 5.2 is a selection of LOs and ASs for Mathematics from Grade R to Grade 1.

Table 5.2: Comparison of Grade R and Grade 1 Standards for Mathematics /
        Numeracy

GRADE R	GRADE 1
LO1: Assessment Standard (AS)1 Counts to at least 10 everyday objects reliably	LO 1: AS 1 Counts at least 34 everyday objects reliably
LO2: AS 2 Creates own patterns	LO2: AS 3 Creates own patterns
LO4: AS 1 Describes the time of day in terms of day or night	LO4: AS 1 Describes the time of day using vocabulary such as 'early', 'late morning', 'afternoon' and 'night'

These LOs and ASs indicate the progression in the skills and knowledge the child acquires from Grade R to Grade 1. A child who has attended Grade R is supposed to have acquired a certain level of skills and knowledge to help him/her learn optimally in Grade 1 class.

- Comparison of Grade R and Grade 1 on Life Orientation

Table 5.3 gives a comparison and progression of assessment standards of Learning Outcome 3 of the Life Orientation Learning Area: Grade R to Grade 1.

Table 5.3: Comparison of Grade R and Grade 1 Assessment Standards for Life Orientation

GRADE R	GRADE 1
LO 3:Assessment standard (AS 3) Expresses emotions without harming self, others or property.	LO 3:AS 3 Shows and identifies different emotions, including respect for living things.
LO 3:AS 4 Adjusts to classroom routine and follows instruction.	LO 3:AS 4 Copes with anger and disagreements in non-destructive ways.
	LO 3:AS 5 Manages the changed environment of the class and the school.

The assessment standards for Grade 1 presume that children who went through Grade R have achieved a certain level of maturity that will enable them to respect other people's feelings and live harmoniously with them without disrupting the class routine.

Children who enter Grade 1 from preschool are supposed to have well developed numeracy, pre-literacy, social and emotional skills, and academic skills that will enable them to adjust without difficulty in the classroom and to continue to refine those skills within the curriculum. Table 5.4 sets out the social skills of the Grade R child in terms of language development in the Learning Area Languages, LO 1 and 2, Assessment standards 3 and 1 respectively.

Table 5.4: Assessment Standards for Learning Area: Languages

GRADE R	GRADE 1
LO1: Assessment standard (AS 3) Shows respect for classmates by giving them a chance to speak, and by listening to them	LO1: AS 2 Shows respect for classmates by giving them a chance to speak, and by listening to them
LO2: AS 2 Uses simple greetings and farewells and responds appropriately to them, and thanks people	LO2: AS 4 Uses simple greetings and farewells and responds appropriately to them, and thanks people

The child who has attended preschool, especially Grade R, should possess skills that will enable him/her to settle in appropriately in the class and to benefit from the activities offered in the class. These assessment standards of the Learning Area Language signify the social skills that children should acquire before proceeding to Grade 1. These skills should further be developed and refined in Grade 1.

Even if these documents do not clearly say that they are addressing transitions, the assessment standards nevertheless imply that children should be equipped with skills that would facilitate their adjustment in class.

5.3.2 Policies and practice: knowledge, understanding and application of policies by users

In determining the effect of policies on practice, interviews were conducted with government officials, NGOs and school principals. The degree to which the policy provision is understood and perceived by those who have to apply it varies in intensity in terms of the context in which it has to be applied. Responses were categorised to identify the level of respondent's understanding and knowledge and are summarised in Table 5.5. An **x** denotes not very certain, √ denotes awareness of the existence of the policy and Ω denotes awareness and use of the policy.

Table 5.5: The effect and application of policies by users

	Existence of transitions in policies	Application of transition policies in schools	Application of in-house transition policies in schools
DOE	Ω	x	x
NGOs	√	x	x
Schools	x	x	Ω

The DOE indicated that they were aware of the existence of transition policies (Ω), but the same cannot be said with regard to NGO's (√) and schools (x). This is in line with the responsibilities of DOE which to a large extent is the drawing up of policies – hence their awareness of the transition policies. NGO's however declared that they were aware of their existence but were not certain to the degree to which they were applied. NGO's have been the backbone of ECD in the black sector of the population for years. With the advent of the new democracy they played an important role in policy making. Parents were excluded in this table indicating the effect and application of policies by users in that they indicated that their literacy level was not high as to comprehend the existence of transition policies. Schools also were unanimous in agreeing that in-house transition strategies or policies existed but their application cascaded from one school to the other depending on how important it was to settle in children in the class. The schools were however not aware of the existence of the government policies regarding transitions.

- Knowledge of official documents

Principals and teachers were asked about their familiarity with the policies dealing with transitions. All of them claimed that they had never seen White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a). This policy document advocates the importance of the establishment of the Reception Year (Grade R) class but does not necessarily give any strategies on how transitions should be negotiated. Those familiar with the policy will be aware of the importance of the Reception year and of forging closer links with the preschools to promote continuity in learning. Closer links between primary schools and preschools were elusive despite an assurance from the DOE official

interviewed that they always saw to it that all schools received policy documents directly from the head office and not through provincial governments. The DOE official, maintaining that schools received policy documents from the Department, said:

> "Any policy that the Department has released, each school receive a copy, so whether they read that policy or not is something else. I can maybe have some reservations with regards to community-based sites, but in terms of schools every piece of paper developed goes to every school-they have not been via the districts, they were delivered at schools so that it is a way of making sure that the documents are received by schools" (DOE official, 2005).

Lack of knowledge by schools of the existence of transitions in official policies can be attributed to the fact that the Grade R classes in this study were situated in preschools. Therefore, schools did not have any link with these classes and also saw no need to forge a link in order to maintain and sustain the continuity in the philosophies underpinning teaching and the content of learning. Consequently, documents were not shared.

Schools which had Grade R on their premises (not part of the case study) lauded the existence of such a class and its importance in preparing children for Grade 1. A principal of a school in the Province B with Grade R attached to her school commented: "If learners did not attend Grade R class, it is difficult to deal with them direct in Grade 1 because their skills are not yet well developed."

Despite the fact that knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding the development of children are put forth in the RNCS policy document, most of the teachers, principals and NGOs interviewed had some reservations about how it was understood and applied practically in class.

- Curriculum content

Principals in the two schools where the study was conducted were not aware of any policy provision for transitions except for the Grade 1 to 3 curricula in the

RNCS. In most instances in-house based school transition strategies being used by teachers were their own strategies to help them in dealing with children's adaptation into a Grade 1 classroom.

The principals in both provinces, however, were not aware of the content of the Grade R curriculum; hence they voiced their apprehension as to its relevancy to the Grade 1 curriculum. The Province A school principal said:

> "We did not actually look at the question of school preparing for the Grade R, we only emphasised the Grade R preparing coming to schools so you have brought two things that we feel we have to look deeply into, interaction between Grade R and the school-we never thought of the school preparing and going to Grade R and saying we've come to observe-so that they may be orientated in terms of what is expected of them when they (children) come to school" (Province A school principal).

The DOE official emphasised the existence of the transition policies and said it was up to the schools to integrate them in their own school policies. If the schools were not aware of the existence of these policies, how were they supposed to practice them? This question leads to the issue of the responsibility for the policy implementation and monitoring.

5.3.3 Ensuring the implementation of policies

Understanding the government's policy position on transitions and its implementation, the following factors need to be taken into consideration:

- The government officials' role and how the role facilitates policy implementation.
- Government's understanding of the application and monitoring of policies and their effectiveness.
- Debates around Grade R.

5.3.3.1   Roles of government officials in establishing and implementing policy

The DOE government official interviewed had been in the service of the Department for the more than five years. She was one of the longest-serving members in the Directorate of Early Childhood Development. This directorate is responsible for the development of policy and guidelines for ECD and the coordination and support of ECD centres and personnel. Her role in the directorate is to ensure the implementation of White Paper No. 5 on ECD and making certain that the "system is ready for making Grade R part of the system". Grade R is actually part of the schooling phase but it is managed within the Directorate of ECD.

The district government official, in describing her responsibilities, focused mainly on training of ECD practitioners and helping the community to register their early learning centres as core to what her job description entailed. The district official was previously a principal of a preschool in Province B. She was subsequently promoted to the district office to take charge of ECD activities. She was chosen for the interview by two other colleagues in the ECD unit as she had better insight into ECD matters. The two other colleagues were high school trained but nevertheless were responsible for ECD matters which included training and monitoring. They did not feel confident enough to speak on ECD matters, as they felt misplaced and not well versed in ECD issues. The district official, however, spoke with enthusiasm as she explained her work and what it entailed.

What came out clearly during the interview with the district official was that she was responsible for the training of teachers. She said: "We give them (teachers/practitioners) basic orientation courses on ECD that is taking them through the classroom arrangement and how must the ECD classroom look like".

Monitoring as explained by the DOE official was another responsibility of the district official. The district official explained it as follows:

"Again it is to visit these early learning centres to see how early learning centres are running, to look at the activities they are given to the children, to look at the kind of the learning support materials that the children are given-and parental involvement. How are parents involved in this because parents need to know what the children are doing and the teacher and the parents must communicate because there is so much the teacher knows about the child the parent doesn't know and it is that part the parent know that the teacher don't."

5.3.3.2   Government's understanding of the application of policies

According to White Paper No. 5 on ECD (DOE, 2001a:39) there are many challenges that face the implementation of a high quality national system of provision of Reception Year (Grade R). Amongst the numerous challenges mentioned in the policy are;

- Improving the quality, equity and cost-effectiveness of the Reception Year programmes;
- Effective support of ECD practitioners to improve teaching;
- Development of provincial leadership, management and implementation capacity and ECD expertise.

The above explains the type of problems besetting the context in which the RNCS was implemented. The DOE official, when asked about the implementation and monitoring of policy procedure, replied by blaming the system for not ensuring that the implementation was carried out as planned. The DOE official saw her role as ensuring that policy was implemented and that there was sufficient monitoring and control but was unable to carry out the actual implementation in the schools as this process was outside her scope of control and influence. The DOE official explained: "Implementation and monitoring is a role of the district office".

The efficacy of the implementation and monitoring differs from one province to the other and one district to the other. In taking a more accountable role, despite the fact that the provinces are vested with the role of monitoring, the DOE itself still

needed to ensure that the role was carried out as specified. Some of the comments expressed included:

> "Maybe as the system we need to ensure that the systems or policies are implemented equally across the country."

> What also compounds this problem is the "attitudes of some educators because they feel that by introducing Grade R we bring additional responsibilities for them-so they cannot really go an extra mile in terms of monitoring the Grade R classes."

In agreement with the DOE official on taking responsibility for the policy implementation and control, a Province B district official said in terms of bringing the primary and the pre-primary phases together:

> "We try to bring the two together because at first the people were seeing early learning centres that have no rule maybe that was not part of the department. So we brought the people together and we did this because most of the early learning centres are established near a primary school-the two parties communicate because from this early learning centre the child will go to this primary school and now the principal of the primary school together with the Grade R must know what is going to happen to these children in Grade 1 so that there must be harmony and smooth sailing."

She echoed the sentiments expressed in White Paper No. 5 on ECD that the Reception Year (Grade R) should form a continuum with Grade 1. It should also be compulsory for all children who enter Grade 1 to have gone through the Reception Year.

According to White Paper No. 5 on ECD (DOE, 2001a: 20) it is not only the teacher who is responsible for preparing the child for learning but parents too have a role to play as "the primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of young children belongs to parents and families". Parental involvement thus becomes of importance in preparing children for school, as they are the principal educators. Highlighting the importance of this view, the district official said:

"Parents need to spend some time with their children-have some activities for parents to do with the child at home. Like I said we need to involve parents for these children to bridge the gap where the child did not go to a Grade R class-so let us have activities to say to mothers 'please do these activities with her at home and you too (teacher) will do some activities with learners'."

The importance of parental involvement cannot be overemphasised. As the Province B district official noted in the interview, there was a vast difference between children coming from home and those coming from preschools. When asked to describe a child coming from preschool as against the one coming from home, she said:

"The home one first of all lacks confidence and is withdrawn. I mean there are so many things to know in life-but the Grade R learner is so confident and whatever you touch, he will tell you what it is… Parents need to spend extra time with these children coming from home."

She furthermore said that parents should be urged and encouraged to buy educational toys over and above ordinary toys like dolls and spend some valuable time with their children for them to catch up with the rest of the children.

5.3.3.3   Debates concerning Grade R

Debates around transitions precipitated the resuscitation of debates concerning the place where Reception Year classes should be situated which was an area of contestation as the NGOs felt that their influence in ECD was being eroded by moving these classes to Primary schools. Preschool in South Africa has always been the domain of the NGOs.

The DOE official expressed the Directorate's dilemma concerning the debate around its present form of offering. The debates focussed on the status of the phase. Should Grade R be made compulsory and how would it be monitored in community structures, as these, fall outside the government framework of governance and monitoring? It is not always possible to remove Grade R altogether from the ambit of

the community structures, as some primary schools are situated far from the children's homes and it would be unfair to let the children travel long distances. According to the DOE official the answer was partly in the Integrated ECD plan, which would coordinate and outline the responsibilities of different departments so that there would be coherency in ECD provisioning and all preschools would benefit largely to the same extent. Thus, discrepancies prevalent in the provisioning would be eliminated. The above understanding coming from the DOE official suggested that there was hope for the resuscitation and maintenance of the phase as providing foundational knowledge, attitudes and skills that will prepare children for optimal learning in the Foundation phase classes even if these classes were in community structures.

5.3.3.4 NGOs and debates concerning Grade R

Two NGO officials were involved in my study. One of the NGO officials is based in Cape Town. Key amongst its functions, the NGO develops materials and trains preschool teachers. It also offers upgrading programmes for preschool teachers and presents workshops for primary school teachers concerned with the reception of a preschooler into Grade 1. The other participant involved in the study was attached to an NGO in the Free State. Her duties were to develop materials for the NGO and to train the NGOs trainers in aspects related to ECD.

Prior to 1994 the NGOs played an important role in establishing and sustaining the provision of ECD in the country, especially in the black sector of the population. With the dawn of the new democratic era the NGOs continued with the provision of ECD in disadvantaged areas. NGOs were involved in early policy decision making such as NEPI which determined the course which ECD was to take. The NGOs also participated in debates on the establishment of Grade R and what it would mean to the stakeholders in terms of control and governance.

About the compatibility of the Grade R and Grade 1 programmes, one NGO member had this to say:

> "Having Grade R is actually a good way of helping the child to learn and understand skills, but I don't know if it is very helpful for the Grade 1 teacher who is formally oriented to receive a child used to really playing-learning in that formal approach."

She added:

> "Why shouldn't Grade 1 be de-formalised so that one is moving up this way because if you think about the development theory nothing says children should stop learning at an informal way at the age of five or six."

The philosophical underpinnings to teaching and learning in the two phases bring about gaps and thus a disjuncture in how they are conceived and their influences in shaping children's learning. The inability of teachers to see the link between Grade R and Grade 1 makes continuity remain elusive.

This is an area of contestation within the NGO field and the government on the importance of Grade R as a foundation or base for transiting into Grade 1. NGOs were lobbying for the government's support in the subsidisation of the whole of the pre-primary phase and not only Grade R. They believe that transition is not an event but a process; therefore it has to start as early as when the child enters preschool. Despite these conflicting opinions coming to the fore on the importance of Grade R, the NGOs also lauded the new Policy on ECD as a groundbreaking piece of legislation, saying: "Grade R was the better option because to some extent one of the options was really (an) upgrading programme, (a) bridging period programme". This was seen as better than nothing as it filled the void experienced prior to the enactment of the policy.

Another cause for concern was that the misinterpretation of Grade R and the fact that a national curriculum was to follow has given teachers the impression that it is a formal phase of learning. The Cape Town-based NGO said:

> "We found classes where teachers do nothing; worksheets are the answers because they don't quite know because there is so much put in them-so many different plans."

This view might not to be applicable to all Grade Rs. With regard to the informality of the Grade Rs, one school principal with Grade R in her school said: "Grade R is not formal-that is why we don't want them to put on school uniform, they don't buy books to write on-most of the time they come on the playground."

The perspectives of both the government and NGOs are imperative in understanding subtle differences in opinions that prevailed in the establishment of Grade R. These perspectives are important in understanding the context in which Grade R is founded and the type of challenges that are faced by its phasing in. Despite debates that prevailed over the establishment of Grade R, both the NGOs and the government are in agreement that Grade R is long overdue and that it is the only possible way in which the inequalities besetting the phase can be dealt with to establish some form of equity.

5.3.3.5   Principals' and teachers' perspectives on Grade R

The principals' understanding and conception of transitions and their relationship with preschools in the two provinces can be understood in terms of the context in which they are situated and the link they have with the district office. The principals, in describing this link, emphasised the administrative connection and spoke very little of matters to do with the curriculum or learning problems. In most instances, schools had to find solutions to problems affecting children with very little support from the district office. Sometimes the principals were unaware of help that could be sought from the district office.

Principals agreed that there was a lack of or very little contact between their schools and preschools (the district offices being the ones to facilitate this link) and that this gap created adversity on the part of the child, as the two units had an influence in how the child made meaning of the whole process. They were aware of the existence of preschools within the schools precincts, but they admitted that they did not know what was going on inside those classes and that they had not familiarised themselves with the curriculum for Grade R. This sentiment was also expressed by schoolteachers in both provinces. Province B teachers' knowledge of Grade R was expressed as follows:

> "Unfortunately I have been in a school where there was no Grade R. I don't have experience but sometimes I talk with some teachers and they tell me that they are doing this and that."

Despite inquiring about the general conditions of teaching and learning in Grade R, none of the teachers had ever sat in a Grade R class, nor had they asked about the curriculum and its links to what they were doing in Grade 1.

In supporting the above statement by teachers, a Province A school principal said that no formal relationship existed between her school and the preschools. Her knowledge was limited to the general knowledge that they "feed the children, teach them how to handle crayons and to colour, discipline manners like sitting together, playing and learning".

The lack of knowledge of the Grade R curriculum content and the important ECD policies outlining the importance of the continuity between Grade R and Grade 1 presupposes that the policies per se do not underline any transition strategies by schools nor do they inform how transitions should be understood to facilitate smooth movement from home or preschool into the Grade 1 class.

Grade R, according to White Paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a), was established to prepare children to learn optimally in Grade 1. School readiness tests are no longer

the benchmark used for accepting a child in Grade 1. When schools were asked how they prepared themselves for receiving Grade 1 children, the Province A school principal replied:

> "We did not actually look at the question of school preparing for the Grade 1, we only emphasised the Grade R preparing for coming to schools-so you have brought two things to us that we feel to look into very deeply, interaction between Grade R and the school."

5.4   GRADE R: CONTINUITY OR DUPLICATION OF GRADE 1?

Conflicting perspectives from the government officials, NGOs and the schools were articulated on the motive and rationale of the two policies, viz. White paper No. 5 on ECD (2001a), and the RNCS (2002). The motives and rationale of these policies, as expounded in the policy documents, are aimed at equipping, nurturing and developing the child in a holistic manner so that they are well prepared to participate actively in a learning environment.

According to NGOs the demands made by parents and primary school teachers have resulted in Grade R classes shifting away from their role of preparing children for Grade 1 into modelling Grade 1 in their approach and outlook. A Grade 1 teacher stated that, "some children from Grade R can write and read, even say the names of the colours".

An NGO concurred with the view of the increasing formality of Grade R classes, and about the level of understanding of teachers of the policy documents, especially the RNCS. The respondent claimed: "Grade R teachers feel pressured to be more formal in order for them to present these kids as being able to know everything."

This means that the Grade R teachers had moved away from the role of preparing children for Grade 1 by equipping the learners with pre-skills related to numeracy, literacy and life skills. Instead they were repeating what had to be done in Grade 1.

The schools not only had limited knowledge of what the Grade Rs were supposed to be doing; they also had very little knowledge of what went on in Grade R or preschool. The following encapsulates Province A teacher's knowledge of preschools:

> "Unfortunately I have been in a school where there was no Grade R. I don't have any experience but sometimes I do talk with some teachers when I get them in Grade R."

Teachers in Province A primary school have only visited preschools for end of year functions when they were invited, and also for assessment purposes of children to determine their school readiness. The reason might be that since the school and the preschool were separately situated they did not perceive their tasks as a continuum, thus sharing information about what they were doing – hence the two sectors ran parallel to one another. This was similar for Province B.

"We usually visit them at the end of the year to assess learners who are ready to come to school and we ask questions," said one Province B primary school teacher in regard to the relationship that existed between her school and the Grade R classes in preschools.

Despite the fact that policy was in existence in as far as "transition" was concerned, it was not enforced nor was it accessible to the people who were supposed to apply it, simply due to ignorance or to the lack of prominence that was given to the continuity between Grade R and Grade 1. Teachers and principals were aware of the existence of Grade R but they lacked knowledge of what transpired in these classrooms that might have a bearing on the kind of teaching and learning going on in Grade 1.

5.5 TRANSITION STRATEGIES OF SCHOOLS

This section will explain the type of strategies put in place by the two case study schools in dealing with transitions and the relationship between the in-house strategies and the government policies.

The following question was crucial in how data were collected:

- What are the transition strategies deployed by the **schools** and home for Grade 1 learners?
- How do **teachers,** parents and children articulate transition strategies encountered by Grade 1 learners?

5.5.1 School in-house transition strategies

The two schools had their own conception of transitions and how best to promote the smooth transition of children. Both schools initially had never thought of strategies of helping children move into the primary school. The idea that they were doing something in that regard only dawned upon them when I discussed what was gleaned from the literature as transition strategies employed in the schools.

Transition strategies differed from one school to the other and the context in which each school found itself also necessitated different kinds of approaches on how to deal with their unique situation. Their sentiments are captured in the following statement by the Province B school principal:

> "Each and every child is accompanied by a parent for the first time even before they come to school-this is what we call orientation phase.-This takes place two weeks before the school closes at the end of the year prior to starting school. We show them the classes, the toilet, the teachers-to get acquainted to the new situation."

Despite the fact that they were unaware of official transition policies, the principals had their own in-house transition strategies which helped to make transitions easier. On one occasion as I visited the Province B school, I found a large number of preschool children accompanied by their preschool teachers/practitioners visiting their new school and meeting the teachers and other children. However, this cohort of children was only from one neighbouring preschool and was not representative of all children who would be coming to school.

The Province A school did not have a specific orientation programme. Sometimes parents brought their children to school, but it was not a formal exercise being undertaken by the school. The principal explained the situation as follows:

> "I feel maybe if there would be time when parents come with the children to school for some sort of orientation it would help a lot-and secondly we can have some programs or sort of assessment as I said about baseline to orientate the children into Grade 1, that will be well or if there could be a formal document that guides the educators to prepare for the school to prepare for these learners, we will be very happy."

- Assessment of children

Responding to the question on how schools categorised children as to their development of skills and knowledge required for Grade 1, the school B principal replied that "they come with profiles but not all of them because some of them are from home or home-based preschools and some from recognised community preschools".

These profiles, which are a portfolio of the tasks and achievements accomplished in Grade R, were used by teachers as baseline information of what children are capable of doing. In the absence of portfolios for children coming from home, teachers relied on information obtained from parents, which might not be as extensive as the preschool portfolio.

5.5.2 Teachers and transition strategies

Teachers who participated in this study had varied experience of teaching Grade 1 ranging from three up to ten years. One grade 1 class teacher in Province B had a teaching experience of ten years, and the Province B class teacher had a teaching experience of three years. Two other teachers in Province A had teaching experience of eight and five years amongst them. The Province B teacher who was not a class teacher but had experience of teaching in Grade 1 only taught for two years in the grade before teaching Grade 3. At the time of the interview she had been in Grade 3 class for almost five years. The qualifications of these teachers were a three year diploma done at a college for Education and a one year advanced diploma obtained through a university. The Province A teacher who was the class teacher was studying for a postgraduate degree with the university. Two teachers in Province B and three in Province A participated in the study.

The study explored the following:

- Teachers' understanding and articulation of transitions;
- Strategies used to help children adapt to a Grade 1 class and how they were conceived.

5.5.2.1 Teachers' understanding and articulation of transitions

Interviews with teachers revealed various understandings of transitions. These were sometimes reflected in the strategies used for helping children adjust in Grade 1.

When asked if it was the responsibility of the school to establish transition strategies, teachers in both provinces felt that it was actually the government's responsibility. They recommended that the government needed to appoint someone responsible for dealing with adjustment and learning problems. The types

of maladjustment problems were multi-fold and they ranged from problems related to socio-economic matters to lack of basic academic skills and lack of transition strategies by schools, resulting in the school's inability to prepare children for learning.

Table 5.5 summarises the perspectives of teachers on their understanding and articulation of transitions. Teachers most frequently commented on factors influencing children's adjustment to school, followed by school and district support and the need for identifying and working with children with learning difficulties. What was discerned from the interviews was that teachers in both provinces never mentioned the school in-house strategies as being very helpful in finding solutions to help children settle in the class. The orientation exercise was mentioned by Province B as the only strategy used by their school that involved the school management. In most cases in dealing with problems of adjustment, the Province B teacher said it was their duty to help children adjust in class. Teachers in both provinces often thought of adjustment problems as associated with lack of academic skills. Lack of social and emotional skills were seldom mentioned. It was only after some coaxing that they accommodated lack of social and emotional skills. Teachers had this to say regarding encountering a serious adjustment problem:

> "When I get a serious problem maybe I can seek help from my colleagues to solve the problem. That is, we don't have other things here" (School B teacher).

There was unanimity amongst teachers in both provinces on the debilitating effects of poverty on adjustments in class. When asked about the feeding scheme at their schools, teachers replied that children were not given enough food. On top of that, no food was served on a Friday, meaning that children would only get their next meal on a Monday. The other most serious condition mentioned by Province B teachers was disability. Disabled children could only be transferred or attended to with the intervention of an official from the district office. However these factors

raised by teachers were the focus of this study – they will need another study to determine their influence in incapacitating the adjustments of children.

All teachers noted that parental support is imperative if children are to adjust well in the classroom, and Province B teachers (2) lauded the importance of Grade R in the transition of children. It is noted from Table 5.6 that teachers in both provinces agreed that motor skills and sharing were important skills for starting school. For example, the Province B teacher noted:

> " when I have a lunch box then I share with them – show them, they must share even if they have two present the other one hasn't".

Province B teachers (2) mentioned the importance of identifying children who need transition programme intervention an issue that requires further investigation.

Table 5.6: Primary School teachers' perspectives and understandings of transitions

Teachers' views on transitions	Total responses	Province A	Province B
Assessment of children	**5**		
differentiate those with/without Grade R		3	
identify those who need transition programme			2
Important skills	**6**		
motor skills		1	1
sharing		2	2
School/district support	**9**		
orientation days for children and parents		2	2
identifying/working with children with learning difficulties		3	2
Factors influencing children's transition	**14**		
poverty		3	2
parental support		3	2
Grade R			2
Disability			2

5.5.2.2 Strategies used by teachers to help children adapt to a Grade 1 class

Various strategies came to the fore that teachers claimed were instrumental in helping children adapt to the class. These strategies were recorded from teachers in Province B. The methods they used to familiarise children with their new context included:

- Inviting parents and children to schools;
- Children being accompanied by their elder siblings to school;
- Inviting preschools at the end of the year to bring in children into the schools.

The above are strategies used by teachers in Province B in settling children in class. As mentioned earlier, teachers were not familiar with the concept of transitions, and thus it took them some time to think of ways and things they did to improve the lives of children. Teachers in both provinces had a different conception of transitions and this was reflected in their answers, which showed mainly the dependency on fellow teachers. This sentiment was supported by a teacher in Province B when she declared that she relies on fellow teachers to help her cope with the adjustments of children.

Teachers' strategies for helping children adapt in class as observed differed from one school to the other. This depended on the familiarity with the skills needed to adjust in the best way possible in Grade 1. Their strategies were based on their "knowledge" of how children were being treated in preschools and on the experiences they had with regard to skills that enabled children to make best adjustments in class. The Province B teacher explained that on the first day of school, they introduce themselves to children and orientate them by showing them the school premises, including the toilets. According to teachers, children were invited to ask them whatever they would like to have, like tissues or borrowing a pen. Teachers in Province B explained that they tried to be friendly so that children

"must open up when we come to learning and not be shy so they must trust the learning programme and teachers".

According to teachers in both schools, they modelled the preschool phase classes as much as they could. Despite the fact that they acknowledged their lack of information about the preschools, they used the little knowledge they had, acting with compassion to the children and showing concern by being "motherly" to them, to make them feel comfortable and confident that they would all make it in learning.

5.6 PRESCHOOL/HOME IMPACTS ON GRADE 1 ADJUSTMENT AND LEARNING

The preschools children attended were community-established or home-based care centres (situated in the home). The practitioners/teachers in these centres were trained by NGOs with some in the Province B who had received a four-year training at a college of education after matriculation. The salaries of these preschool teachers in both provinces were paid from the school fund, as they were not under the subsidy framework of the government. Some preschools in Province B were subsidised by government. The salaries of the teachers in the preschool centres (not necessarily the ones feeding the primary schools under the study) were paid for by the government.

The school in Province A was situated in a predominantly informal settlement with pockets of low-cost housing visible. According to teachers, a high number of parents did not work; hence some could not afford to send their children to preschools. The Province B school was situated in a low economic area. The parents of the children were unemployed. In both schools teachers complained about the prevalent abject poverty, which undermined the amount of effort they put into the classroom.

The impact of preschool education on learning will be divided into academic skills and socio-emotional skills.

5.6.1 Academic skills

When asked about the characteristics that they deemed important for a child to adapt well in the classroom, teachers in both provinces mentioned mainly the academic skills. This included the ability to write their name and to count and some social skills such as the ability to communicate, listen and execute commands.

Teachers of the two schools differed in their perception of the differences brought about by preschool education. The difference brought by preschool education was discerned and echoed mainly by the Province B teachers.

Children from preschool were lauded as capable of learning. Some of these children came from home-based preschools-and it was in relation to these centres that teachers complained that very little was done in terms of equipping them with knowledge and skills to enable them to participate meaningfully in the classroom. These children could hold a pen and write their own names.

> "I think most of the ones coming from preschools they have already developed the motors, essential skills but with the ones from home those who did not do Grade R they are learning through their sisters. That develops their own interest preparing themselves to wanting to come to school to attend for the first time. So maybe that is why at times they differ but slightly there is no such a gap," according to a Province A teacher.

In dealing with this difference brought about by the preschool education the Province B teacher indicated that in seating children in the classroom she took the following into consideration:

> "I always take those who come from home and sit her/him next to the one who come from Grade R-so that when involved in group activities

they must see to it that the 'home' one is involved. So after a month you find that they are okay – you will find that he/she has adjusted in the classroom."

She furthermore explained the disjuncture brought about by some preschool education:

"Grade R uses English and when children come to Grade 1 we use their mother tongue and that makes some difficulties to them to switch off from English to go their mother tongue way because mother tongue is basic to learning-to bridge this gap we use both languages, i.e. English as spoken and Setswana as both spoken and written."

She explained that she deals with this problem by teaching in both Setswana and English. English was being phased in steadily from Grade 1, rather than waiting until Grade 3 level as recommended by the RNCS.

5.6.2 Socio-emotional skills

Differences in socio-emotional skills between the preschool children and the children who had not attended preschool (home children) were noted by staff in both provinces especially Province B. These socio-emotional skills ranged from lack of confidence in executing tasks to crying a lot in class. Home children were seen as lacking in confidence, unable to share, crying most of the time and lacking basic perceptual skills, such as the ability to be attentive for a longer period.

However, what was apparent as lacking in all the teachers interviewed was their "ignorance" about what was going on in Grade R, as previously noted. They had nevertheless established their own criteria of a school ready child, but had not come to terms with the fact that the school itself had to be ready for the children.

None of the teachers had ever felt that it was important to establish the kind of content and skills emphasised in Grade R to form a link with what was supposed to be done in Grade 1.

What was highlighted and came out very strongly, especially in Province B, was their emphasis on the ability of children to share. Only after some probing were aspects such as the ability to work with others and not to cry featured prominently as some of the desirable skills that would facilitate learning. Sharing as a social skill was very important. This was emphasised as a desirable skill that would promote sharing with children from poor backgrounds so as not to expose those children thus subjecting them to "ridicule" from other children. The importance of sharing was expressed in this way:

> "When I have lunch box then I share with them I show them, they must share even if they have two presents the other one has not-they must be able to share even when they grow up-they must not be selfish-and this must start with us as teachers-you find I know the method for reading and I don't want to share with others."

5.7 PARENTAL ROLE IN CHILDREN'S TRANSITIONS

Parents of the twelve case study children were interviewed as to their participation in enhancing their children's transitions. Parents showed trepidation about their children leaving home and were unsure on how they were going to adjust in school. In both schools parents indicated that their children were scared of going to school. Parents are an important agency for supporting their children in education. Parents have been reported to be apprehensive about the ability of their children to adjust in school. This trepidation has been noted as sometimes affecting children negatively.

The parental role in the transitions of children can be understood from the following perspectives:

- Their understanding of transitions;
- What is regarded as important characteristics in children for settling in at school?

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- The strategies parents use in helping children settle in school;
- Different perspectives on parental role in supporting children in school.

Parents as the primary educators of children play an important role in how children experience school. This study would therefore be incomplete if it did not include the role played by parents, as they are a "powerful mediator" of continuity from home into school. The following questions were employed in elucidating the role and purpose of parental involvement in children's transitions:

- What are the transition strategies deployed by the schools and **home** for Grade 1 learners?
- How do teachers, **parents** and children understand and articulate the transition strategies encountered by Grade 1 learners?

5.7.1 Parental understanding of transitions

The family is a social institution with its own cultural, structural and regulatory frameworks-and these shape the development pathways of children. Transitions are therefore shaped by the family as the primary education milieu the child encounters in their life and by the schools, which are the secondary education milieu. Parents and teachers alike, in this study, seem to have internalised the responsibility of imparting skills imperative to enable children to live harmoniously with others, and to learn in the classroom.

The role of parents in supporting their children was acknowledged and encouraged by teachers. Parents are aware of their importance in their child's life. This makes the child feel secured and acknowledged in what she/he is doing. A parent expressed her school's desire to have her involved in her child's education in this way:

> "I have realised that at school they need parents to work with the teachers, we must be there to ask children about what they did during the day at school, teach them-but we parents do not seem to give ourselves the time to get involved in our children's education. Teachers at the school do give us the idea that we must take care of our children's educational needs."

Some parents expressed the desire to get much more involved in their children's education, but because of job commitments, they were unable to do so. One parent who was a domestic worker told how she tried to make time for her child's education:

> "I usually send his aunt to go and fix out for me what is the problem and if it's something that I have to fix then I will ask for a day off from work. As you know these temporary domestic jobs-if you take time off you will not be paid. So I sometimes ask the aunt to get me the contact numbers of the teacher, so that I can call her at home after work."

A parent with a child who had not gone to a preschool, felt that if he had had his way he would have sent his son to a preschool as he saw a big difference between him and the older siblings who had gone to preschool. Although parents admitted that they had to take much greater responsibility than they were doing at present, they nevertheless felt that it was the school's responsibility to ensure that learners learnt as well as possible in conducive environments.

What was common in all of the interviews in both provinces was that parents emphasised academic skills as the most important skills for children to have before commencing with schooling. Learning English was also a sign that the child was ready for school. This was apparent in an interview with one parent who spoke proudly about his son who used a few English words in his conversation. This was a sign that a foundation had been laid for formal education.

5.7.2 Characteristics important for successful learning

Academic skills were reported as important for the child to have in order to perform optimally in the classroom. Respect was regarded as a desirable behaviour, together with listening to teachers and avoiding conflict.

Respect as good behaviour would earn one the respect of teachers and fellow learners and the teacher herself would have patience with such a child. Other characteristics included the ability not to be shy and the ability to make friends. These were seen as core to the ability to adjust well in class. Parents encouraged their children to report any misdemeanour to the teacher and not to deal with it themselves.

5.7.3 Parental strategies for transitions

Parents developed strategies in their own ways to help their children settle in school. One parent noted that her child was crying all the time when she began school. She decided to deal with this by letting the child walk to school with an older cousin; this helped him get accustomed to the routine. The child was able to overcome fears of the school and teachers. One parent commented that her child was scared of other people, especially large groups of people. Her parents encouraged him to join other children as they passed by going to school. This helped him to get used to other children and like schooling. On the other hand, a Province A parent who had a child who cried a lot when going to school decided to leave him alone as he was afraid of being labelled "an abusive parent". The child eventually outgrew the crying stage and according to his father, he was now as happy as ever.

Parents seem to be carrying out this responsibility irrespective of whether the child had attended preschool or not. Parents took it upon themselves to impart to their children academic skills such as writing and reading, especially their names. This

enabled children to perform optimally in the classroom. This was done to reinforce and complement what was learned at the preschool and prepare those who had never gone to a preschool.

Parents, when asked whether if it was the preschools or they themselves who helped children in learning, always gave credit to the preschools. This was also the case with children who did not go to preschool, as the parents transferred the credit for the school readiness of their children to other parties, such as siblings who went to school and taught them how to read and write. What could be discerned from the parents' interview was that they did not shift the responsibility for preparing the child for school on teachers/practitioners-they familiarised the children with what awaited them. This attitude and practice was even more common amongst families who did not send their children to preschool. One boy's parent in Province B explained: "He had a friend who used to tell him what they were doing at school, so he did have an idea of what was to happen and we also at home helped him by teaching him how to write and how to put letters together."

This kind of intervention was prevalent in families in both provinces. A parent in Province A echoed a Province B parent, telling how he explained to his son who was going to school for the first time:

> "I did explain to him that his age does not allow him to stay home any more, the reason he did not go to preschool is this unemployment story-I explained that he has to learn at school and his sisters also helped him with his vowels (a, e, i, o, u) until he knew them a little, only then was he allowed to go and play with friends."

Children are also aware of the differences between home/preschool and the primary school environments. Parents noted that these differences made the children nervous. One parent commented: "He sees that they do not sleep any more but spend the whole day learning."

5.7.4 Parental role from the teachers' perspective

Parents played a prominent and important role in the two schools the study was conducted. In most cases, the parent/s brought the child to school on the first day. A Province B teacher maintained that it was imperative to get parents on board so that they were fully informed of the role they should play. She maintained that for the good of the child the teacher and parents must work together and that the parents were free to advise the teacher on what they felt was best for their child- the same went for the teacher. She emphasised that children's feelings must be respected at all times, and in that way they would trust you and confide in you for any problems they experienced – whether they originated from home or school.

Parental responses on their contribution and understanding of children's transition to school are summarised in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Parental understandings of transitions

Parental views on transitions	Total responses	Province A	Province B
Preparation for schooling	16		
Parental guidance		4	3
Sibling		4	3
Friends		2	
Important skills	47		
Academic skills		4	3
Listening skill		3	3
respect		4	4
Avoidance of fighting		4	4
No shyness		3	3
No crying		3	3
Ability to make friends		3	3
Support for the school	7		
Helping with homework		4	3

From the above table it appears that parents regarded skills such as the social, i.e. the ability to make friends (6) and avoidance of fighting (8) and emotional such as avoidance of crying (6) and academic skills (7) as important and basic to starting school. Parents (7) had also taken the onus upon themselves to help their children with homework. Friends and siblings were also recognised as offering an important source of support for the first time school goer.

5.8   CHILDREN'S VOICES IN THE TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

Children's transition to a primary school is a critical point in their lives. Transition presupposes a change in context for children and a change of identity. As children move from preschool and home into a primary school they commute between two cultural worlds which also define who they are as the "child" and "learner" and how they experience these worlds. This section traces the children's experiences as co-constructors of meaning in both the home and the school contexts. The impact of the transition strategies deployed by the home and the school contexts on children is illuminated.

In developing the argument that children's voices carry the essence of how transitions are being made and experienced by those who make them, this section traces the children's experiences from their previous settings to the present primary school setting.

The following question was imperative to ask in tracing their pathway in the transitions:

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

5.8.1 Children's conception of school

A mixed reaction came from children when asked about how they felt when leaving home and preschool. They responded: "I was afraid and my heart was so painful to leave the preschool-we were told teachers were beating children." At the same time, some children were very excited about leaving preschool and home, because preschool was associated with playing and not with serious work and they complained that at home they were made to wash dishes, a task they loathed.

When asked about who told them about school and what they were going to do there, most children, even those who had gone to preschool, responded that it was their mothers. Most of the children said their mothers first brought them to school. When asked to compare school and preschool children had much to say. Their responses are presented in Table 5.8 according to predominant topics. The quotations under the topics represent the sentiments held by the children. These quotes were taken from the interviews with children in the two provinces.

Table 5.8: Comparison of children's preschool experiences with primary school experiences

Children's experiences	Total responses	Province A	Province B
Physical structure	**6**		
"We know that it is a big building"		3	3
Routine	**18**		
"And at school we do write"		6	6
"At school there is a lot of work-we are tired when we reach home"		3	3
Fear of the unknown	**12**		
"I was afraid of teachers because I was thinking that they beat very hard"		**3**	**3**
"I was afraid of coming to school. My heart was sore"		4	2
Relationship with other children	**3**		
"When I started schooling, the school was full of people and I was afraid of getting in to the school"		3	
Pre-school/ school	**21**		
"At the crèche[1] they gave us food, we sleep and we play"		6	6
"School is better than crèche"		5	4
Futuristic nature of schools	**6**		
"Schools help us to pass and find jobs so that we can get money to give to our parents-buy food in the house-and cars"		6	

Despite some negative responses about school, most of the children felt that school was better than preschool and the reason given was that they learned how to read and write so that they "could pass and find jobs, buy food in the house, clothes and cars and give them to our parents". Children seemingly knew what to expect when they entered school. The fact that they knew that a school was a big building was an indication that they could differentiate it from their own homes and preschools (6). All twelve in the two provinces knew that they were expected to read and write, and they were also aware that they were not going to be allowed to sleep.

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[1] In townships preschools are referred to as crèches, a name widely used to denote a custodial centre for 0-4 year-olds.

At this early stage children had already formed their own opinion on education – that it is a pathway to a good life – hence they would prefer a school to the preschool. Work done at preschool was viewed as playing and not learning.

Even children who went to preschool claimed that their mothers taught them how to read and write as foundational to teaching in the primary school. Children claimed that they were now able to write dictation and had mastered numeracy because of the help they received from parents or siblings.

Despite the fact that children had not attended preschool, they were in their own way ready to participate in school activities. Explaining how the mother helped her to cope in class, one child said: "Before I came to school my mother used to teach me, she used to teach me to write and my father used to teach me to write numbers."

The perseverance to succeed and the fact that education was seen as the alternative to free one from poverty was a motivator to both parents and children to exert themselves. The fact that primary schools were free motivated most children, because they believed if they worked hard they would be rewarded with money that would enable them to build houses for their parents.

5.9   CONCLUSION

5.9.1 Interrelationship of roles of principal players in children's transitions

The transitions of children cannot be studied in isolation-but can be understood within contexts in a broader socio-cultural setting. Children's transitions are influenced and shaped by societal, family and their own life experiences. The interrelationships of these contexts are crucial for the way in which transitions are experienced as negative or positive.

The analysis of policy documents on transition of children were able to reveal the extent to which transition were addressed. Although the documents did not address transition per se, it was implied in the sense that the documents addressed adjustments of children. The analysis of documents and the different perspectives by key players in policy formulation were clearly delineated. The differences in opinions and similarities were brought together Different perspectives were captured on the key player's position in as far as transitions were addressed.

The case study of the two schools in Provinces A and B has revealed the different type of strategies employed by the schools in the transition of children. The differences and similarities in these strategies are captured in Table 5.4 which explains the type of strategies used by teachers in the absence of the wider in-house school strategies.

Interviews with parents revealed differences in how parents understood and dealt with transitions of their own children. The different perspectives by parents are captured and represented in table 5.7. Parents indicated their willingness to work more closely with the teacher.

Children's voices brought forward their own experiences of transitions. These experiences were compared with the observation made by the researcher on how they interact with one another and the teacher in class. This deepened my understanding of their actions and what brought about those actions.

The next chapter will give a detailed analysis of how children make transitions as measured by the SSRS, which is a multi-rater assessment of student social and adaptive behaviour including the academic performance which determines the degree of adjustment and eventual learning of a child in class. It will clearly show what impact the preschools had on the child's social and adaptive behaviour and academic competence.

CHAPTER 6

CHILDREN'S ADJUSTMENT CAPABILITY AS MEASURED BY THE SOCIAL SKILLS RATING SYSTEM (SSRS)

6.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter Six provides an insight into backgrounds and adjustments in Grade 1 of the 12 case study children, as observed by the researcher, parents and teachers. Adjustment was identified using the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). The scale was used by both parents and teachers over a period of two months at the beginning of April in the year in which children started formal schooling.

The SSRS assessed children's adjustment in the domains of social skills, problem behaviours skills and academic competence as described in Chapter Five.

The Social Skills domain consists of the following subscales:
- Cooperation scale;
- Assertion scale;
- Responsibility scale (for parents only);
- Self-control scale.

The Problem Behaviour domain consists of:
- Internalising behaviour;
- Externalising behaviour;
- Hyperactivity.

Lastly, the Academic Competence scale is a single domain consisting of nine items. Each of the items defines the academic competence of the child as compared to that of the rest of the class.

To enable consistent understanding and interpretation of the SSRS items, I discussed the items of the rating scale with each of the parents and teachers.

6.2   HOME BACKGROUND OF CHILDREN

The twelve children involved in the case study for this research came from disadvantaged backgrounds. Members of the households had little education, although some had received high school education. The parents could read, but reading was seldom done; hence, it was unreasonable to expect parents to read the rating scale on a regular basis.

In the interviews with parents, it became apparent that most of the parents who attended the interviews were unemployed. Amongst them were two men who had been unemployed for over five years. Two mothers worked as domestic servants. Parents' source of income was mainly the state's Child Care Grants money of about R190 per child per month, or an income brought by one of the relatives living with the family if both parents were without work.

Family types were either 'traditional' i.e. consisting of a man and a woman, or single parents. All of the children had one or more relatives staying with them, with four (4) of them staying with more than five relatives. Ten children had more than one sibling. Their homes were two- to four-roomed low-cost housing with a shack or two attached to the main house. They were either the owners of the brick house or rented a shack in the backyard.

6.3   ANALYSIS OF THE SSRS SCORES

The SSRS was used to identify the level/degree of adjustment shown by children as they entered Grade 1. However it should be noted that given the small sample sizes, findings cannot be generalised to the school populations from which they were drawn.

Data were gathered through observations of children by the teacher, with me being available for consultation in the class. The data were also collected during my absence. The SSRS-Elementary Parent version was used by parents at home to record the frequency and importance of a social skill or behaviour.

To identify children's social, behavioural and academic adjustment to the new context, the frequency in which the criteria at hand were exhibited and the importance afforded such criterion were recorded. However, given the scope of the current project, results in relation to the importance of items on the SSRS are not reported here. Results enabled:

- An analysis of ratings on the social skills and behavioural skills by the teacher and parent on children in each of the two provinces. This included the comparison of preschooled children with the home children. The comparison on gender basis was also done where possible. The analysis of ratings was further done across provinces.

- An analysis and comparison of teacher ratings in each province and across provinces on the academic competence of both preschooled and home children. The comparison on gender basis was also done where possible.

6.4 HOME AND SCHOOL VARIABLES

The home and school variables as explained in Chapter Four are imperative for understanding the context in which these rating scales were used. Factors such as parents using the scale for the first time might have had an impact on how the items of the rating scale were interpreted. Both teachers and parents claimed that it was the first time that they were involved in a research project, which might have affected their understanding of the intention of the rating scale and made them unsure and uneasy.

6.5 ANALYSIS OF RATINGS BY TEACHERS AND PARENTS FOR CHILDREN IN EACH OF THE TWO PROVINCES: SOCIAL SKILLS

6.5.1 Introduction

Summaries of teacher and parent ratings of children's social skills are presented in Tables 6.1 and 6.2. Higher scores on the social skills domain reflect positive and acceptable traits or characteristics and lower scores imply deficiency in desirable traits. Examples of the Social Skills items can be found in Chapter Four, Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

When comparing the teacher and parent ratings for the different social skills sub-domains (Table 6.1) it should be noted that parents provided ratings of children's responsibility at home, whereas this sub-domain was not included in the teacher scales. The responsibility scores by parents are indicated in brackets in the table but are not included in the total social skills scores as the results might be skewed in favour of the parents. This was taken into account when comparing the total social skills scores.

6.5.2 Analysis of ratings of social skills: Teacher and Parent: Province A

A comparison of the teacher and parent ratings of children's social skills for Province A is provided in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Social Skills Subscales Scores: Province A

	SOCIAL SKILLS DOMAIN SUBSCALES Province A											
	Preschooled children						Home children					
	Child 1/B		Child 2 /B		Child 3 /G		Child 4 /B		Child 5 /G		Child 6 /G	
	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P
C	10	12	13	8	7	9	10	12	8	17	13	13
A	9	9	12	17	10	8	9	12	6	15	10	11
R		{7}		{6}		{11}		{14}		{18}		{8}
S	11	4	10	17	12	13	10	18	8	13	9	5
Total	30	25	35	42	29	30	29	42	22	45	32	29

Y axis	X axis
C = Cooperation	T = Teacher ratings
A = Assertion	P = Parent ratings
R = Responsibility	B = Boy
S = Self-control	G = Girl

Social Skills sub-domain scores provided by teachers and parents were summed, a total social skills score computed, and scores tabulated to enable comparison. Results for Province A are presented in Table 6.1. Teacher scores for each sub-domain were generally the same or lower than those of parents. However, exceptions are noted for Child 1 for self-control, Child 2 in relation to cooperation, Child 3 for assertion and Child 6 for cooperation and self-control with the teacher scores being higher than the parent scores.

No clear pattern is revealed when comparing parent ratings for preschooled and home children although parents of home children tended to rate their children more highly than the parents of preschooled children. Differences between teacher and parent scores for preschooled children in sub-domains varied from 0 to 5 whereas differences between teacher and parent scores for home children in sub-domains varied from 0 to 9. Child 5, a home child, had the highest total score of 45 by the parent and the lowest score of 22 by the teacher. When comparing total social skills

scores for preschooled and home children it can be seen that most children received scores between 29 and 35 whereas one home child received a much lower score (22) than the other children. Within the parameters of this study, one cannot assume that it is due to the child not attending preschool.

Another reason for this discrepancy might be a result of differences in behavioural expectations and interpretations between the school and the home contexts. It may also reflect children's familiarity and confidence in the home environment in comparison with the new school context. The home context, being different from the school context, might also be eliciting different kinds of behaviours from children which are seldom exhibited at school-thus the discrepancy in the teacher and parent ratings. There is no consistent pattern between ratings for boys compared with girls and this is compounded by unequal numbers of case study boys and girls in the preschooled and home sectors.

6.5.3 Analysis of ratings on the social skills: Teacher and Parent: Province B

Results for Province B are presented in Table 6.2. As with Province A, teachers typically rated children lower than parents did with the exception of Child 8 (cooperation and self-control) and Child 9 (assertion).

Table 6.2: Social Skills Subscales Scores: Province B

	SOCIAL SKILLS DOMAIN SUBSCALES											
	Province B											
	Preschooled children						Home children					
	Child 7 /B		Child 8 /B		Child 9 /G		Child 10 /B		Child 11/G		Child 12 /G	
	T	**P**	**T**	**P**	**T**	**P**	**T**	**P**	**T**	**P**	**T**	**P**
C	10	15	16	10	15	15	3	11	3	13	14	14
A	10	15	4	14	18	16	2	14	6	10	14	15
R		{13}		{7}		{17}		{7}		{15}		{14}
S	11	14	9	5	11	15	4	11	4	12	8	9
Total	31	44	29	29	44	46	9	36	13	35	36	38

Y axis	X axis
C = Cooperation	T = Teacher ratings
A = Assertion	P = Parent ratings
R = Responsibility	B = Boy
S = Self-control	G = Girl

When comparing ratings for preschooled and home children, preschooled children tended to receive higher teacher ratings than children from home. Very low total teacher scores, 9 and 13, are noted for two home children (Child 10 and Child 11) respectively while preschooled children received total teacher-rated social skills scores of between 29 and 44. There is again discrepancy between the teacher and parent ratings on the assertive skills of Child 8 (preschooled) and Child 10 (home child). The difference between the teacher and parent ratings for Child 8 (assertive skills) is 10 and for Child 10 is 12. Both children are boys.

The differences between teacher and parent ratings for home children was greater than those for preschooled children, with teacher scores generally considerably lower than those of parents. For example, the differences between teacher and parent scores for home children ranged from 0 to 12 and for preschooled children ranged from 3 to 10.

In comparing total social skills scores for boys and girls, it can be seen that girls received higher teacher-rated scores than boys. Preschooled children had higher and generally consistent scores by the teacher and parents.

The discrepancy in teacher and parent social skills ratings for children who did not attend preschool suggests that there are differences in behavioural expectations between the school and home setting. Conversely, results also suggest that parents of children who attended preschool appear to have similar interpretations or expectations of their child's behaviour to the teacher's.

6.5.4 Comparison of ratings of parents and teachers on the social skills across the provinces

When comparing total teacher and parent social skills ratings across provinces (Table 6.3), preschooled children tended to receive higher total social skills scores than home children. Girls also received higher scores than boys. Parents scored their children much higher than teachers. In Province A, total parent scores for child 2, 3, 4 and 5 were higher than the teachers' and in Province B child, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 received higher scores by parents than the teacher's.

Table 6.3: Total Social Skills Scores: Provinces A and B
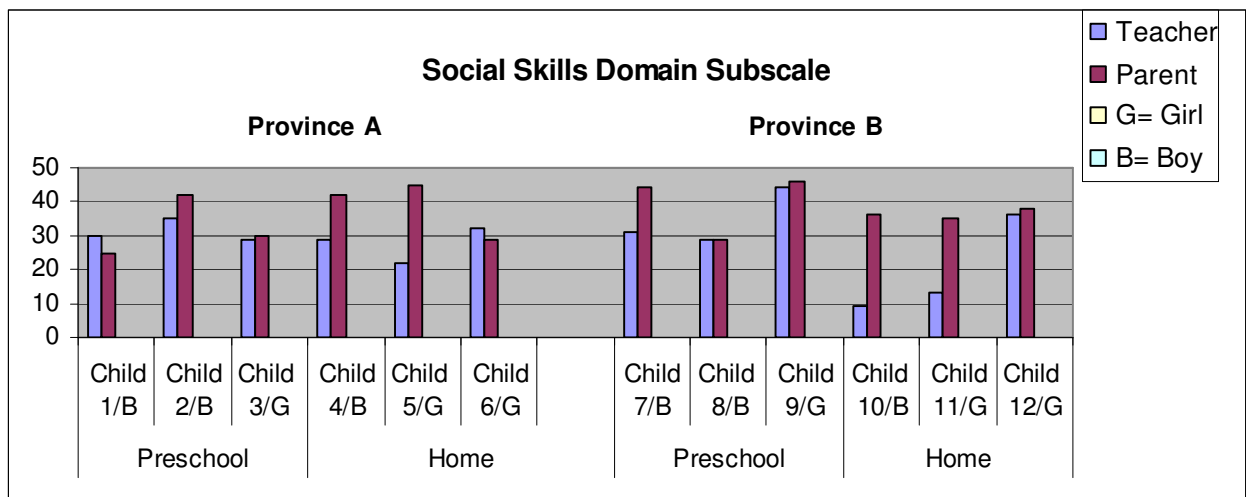
There is less variation between the total scores of Province A children than those of Province B children, with the total scores for preschooled children in each province being more similar than the total scores for home children. For example, with a range of 29 to 35, the variation between total scores for preschooled children in Province A

was 6, compared with 15 for children in Province B (range 31 to 44); and the difference in total scores for Province A home children was 10 (range 22 to 32) compared with a difference in scores of 25 for Province B children (range 9 to 36). Interestingly, one preschooled child and one home child in Province B also received the highest teacher-rated total social skills scores (44 and 36). The two lowest teacher ratings of children's social skills (9 and 13) were for home children (Child 10 and child 11 respectively) in Province B and the lowest score of 22 in Province A was also for a home child

When comparing social skills ratings of parents from the different provinces, parents in Province B typically rated their preschooled children more highly than the parents in Province A whereas parents in Province A rated home children's social skills more highly than parents in Province B. Interestingly, the greatest consistency among parent-rated total social skills scores occurred for home children in Province B (35 to 38). The difference in parent-rated summed social skills scores was between 16 and 17 for all other groups of children.

Results indicate that preschooled children received higher social skills scores than the home children and girls got higher scores than boys.

6.6   ANALYSIS OF RATINGS ON THE PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR SKILLS BY TEACHERS AND PARENTS FOR CHILDREN IN EACH OF THE TWO PROVINCES

6.6.1 Introduction

Problem behaviour sub-domain scores provided by teachers and parents were summed, a total problem behaviour score computed, and scores tabulated to enable comparison. When analysing problem behaviour scores it has to be noted that unlike the social skills where high ratings meant high levels of social skills, in this instance high ratings mean high levels of problem behaviours. The highest score possible for

all the subscales was 36. Fewer problem behaviours imply that children have made good adjustments to school.

6.6.2 Analysis of ratings on problem behaviours: Teacher and Parent: Province A

Teacher and parent-rated problem behaviour scores for children in Province A are presented in Table 6.4

Table 6.4: Problem Behaviour subscales scores: Province A

	PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR DOMAIN SUBSCALES Province A										
	Preschooled children						Home children				
	Child 1 B		Child 2 B		Child 3 G		Child 4 B		Child 5 G		Child 6 G	
	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P
E	2	9	2	8	6	1	2	2	2	12	5	5
I	3	4	5	3	8	9	3	3	3	10	11	7
H	6	3	3	4	3	5	3	0	5	11	6	3
Total	11	16	10	15	17	15	8	5	12	33	22	15

Y axis
E = Externalising behaviour
 I = Internalising behaviour
H = Hyperactivity

X axis
T = Teacher ratings
P = Parent ratings
G = Girl
B = Boy

When comparing sub-domain scores it can be seen that teachers rated children as having fewer problem behaviours than parents with some exceptions as noted in Table 6.4. This is in contrast to ratings of social skills where teacher-rated scores were lower than parent-rated scores. The greatest difference between teacher and parent scores were recorded for two home children (Child 5 and child 6). Child 6 was rated by their teacher as having higher levels of problem behaviours at school whereas parent ratings indicated lower levels of these behaviours at home, and child 5 received a much lower teacher score for problem behaviour (12) than parent ratings at home (33). It is not unusual for difficulties in adjusting to school to manifest themselves in problem behaviours which may account for the difference in problem behaviour ratings between school and home, in particular for children who did not attend preschool prior to commencing school.

When comparing teacher scores for preschooled and home children there is no significant difference: two children from each sector received scores under 12 and one child from each sector received scores of 17 or above. The children with the highest problem behaviour scores were both girls. There are consistent ratings by the teacher and parents for both preschooled and home children. This implies that both preschooled and home children equally exhibit either poor or good adjustments in school.

6.6.3 Analysis of ratings of problem behaviours: Teacher and Parent: Province B

Teacher and parent-rated problem behaviour scores for children in Province B are presented in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: Problem Behaviour subscales scores: Province B

	PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR DOMAIN SUBSCALES Province B											
	Preschooled children						Home children					
	Child 7 B		Child 8 B		Child 9 G		Child 10 B		Child 11 G		Child 12 G	
	T	**P**	**T**	**P**	**T**	**P**	**T**	**P**	**T**	**P**	**T**	**P**
E	5	5	0	2	4	8	1	6	0	5	4	8
I	7	5	0	6	0	8	2	6	7	9	7	5
H	10	6	4	5	1	3	1	16	3	2	4	6
Total	**22**	**16**	**4**	**13**	**5**	**19**	**4**	**18**	**10**	**16**	**15**	**19**

Y axis
E = Externalising behaviour
 I = Internalising behaviour
H = Hyperactivity

X axis
T = Teacher ratings
P = Parent ratings
G = Girl
B = Boy

As with children in Province A, school A, when comparing sub-domain scores it can be seen that teachers in Province B, school B rated children as having fewer problem behaviours than indicated by parents, except for Child 7. Again, these results contrast with ratings of social skills, where teacher-rated scores were lower than parent-rated scores. The greatest differences between teacher and parent scores were recorded for two preschooled children (Child 8 and Child 9) and one home child (Child 10) with

teacher-rated scores being lower than parent-rated scores by 9, 14 and 14 respectively. Reasons for this discrepancy need further investigation and were outside the scope of this particular study. There is a greater range in problem behaviour scores for this group of children (4 to 22) by both the teacher and parents. By contrast the range of scores for home children was 4 to 15. Parent-rated problem behaviour was more consistent than teacher ratings for preschooled and home children. No consistent differences were noted between boys and girls although one preschooled boy (Child 22) had the highest problem behaviour score at school, followed closely by two home girls.

However, with this small sample and the unequal number of boys as compared to girls it cannot be said without doubt that girls consistently experience a high level of problem behaviour in comparison with boys.

6.6.4 Comparison of problem behaviours across provinces

Table 6.6 illustrates the total problem behaviour scores for children in each province. Teachers in both provinces tended to rate children with fewer problem behaviours than parents did. This may be an indication that parents found it more difficult to manage children's behaviour at home than teachers and/or an indication of children's behaviour in different contexts. One preschooled child and one home child in each province appeared to have more difficulty than others adjusting to school in terms of higher levels of problem behaviours as rated by teachers (scores of 15 to 22).

Table 6.6: Problem Behaviours total scores across provinces
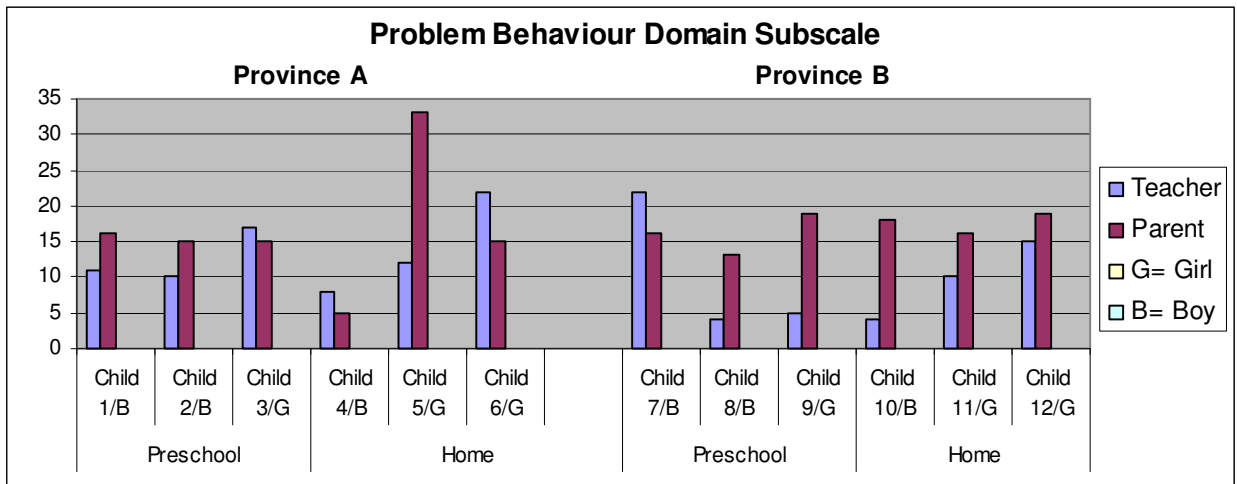
Differences between provinces are also noted. Children in Province A had higher levels of teacher-rated problem behaviours than children in Province B. However, the behaviour of preschooled children in Province A showed less variation than the behaviour of preschooled children in Province B. By contrast, home children in Province A had a greater range of problem behaviour total scores (8, 12, 22) than home children in Province B (4, 10, 15).

When comparing problem behaviour ratings of parents from the different provinces, similarity of ratings is noted for preschooled children with total problem behaviour scores ranging from 13 to 19. More variation is noted between the parent-rated scores for home children with greater differences being recorded for children in Province A (5 to 33) than Province B (16 to 19). Consistent gender differences within and between provinces are difficult to determine. Of the two children who received total teacher-rated problem behaviour scores of 22, one was a preschooled boy from Province B and the other a home girl from Province A.

6.7 TEACHER RATINGS OF ACADEMIC COMPETENCE

6.7.1 Introduction

To identify children's academic competence using the SSRS, teachers compared the performance of each child to the rest of the children in the classroom. The scale for scoring the performance ranged from 1, for the lowest 10%, 2 for the next 20%, 3 for the middle 40%, 4 for the next highest 20% and 5 for children amongst the highest 10% in class. The items on this scale covered the overall academic performance including reading and mathematics, which form the core of the Foundation phase curriculum. In Grade 1 the focus of the curriculum is on literacy skills like the ability to interpret the cover of the book, the ability to associate a caption with a picture, or the ability to decode a new word, and on mathematical concepts such as the ability to group objects according to some similarities and to count.

6.7.2 Analysis of academic competence ratings: Province A

Analyses of academic competence items for children in Province A are presented in Table 6.7

Children who commenced school after attending preschool were more frequently rated in the top 10% or next highest 20% of their class for each item in the academic competence domain. Two of the preschooled children received 4 and 3 five grading scores (top 10%) and 3, 6 and 3 four grading scores (next top 20%). Children who did not attend preschool were more frequently rated in the middle 40% of their class for each item. They scored I each of the 5 grading scores (top 10%) and 3 and 1 four grading scores (next top 20%). More children who attended preschool had higher total scores for academic competence compared with home children. While all home children and one preschooled child had total scores ranging from 29 to 32, the two children with the highest scores (38 and 39) had attended preschool. It is difficult to compare the scores of boys and girls from preschooled and home sectors as there are inconsistent numbers of each.

Table 6.7: Academic competence scores: Province

	Preschooled children			Home children		
	Child 1/B	Child 2/B	Child 3/G	Child 4/B	Child 5/G	Child 6/G
The **overall academic performance** of this child is:	5	4	3	3	4	3
In **reading**, how does this child compare with other students?	5	4	4	3	3	2
In **mathematics**, how does this child compare with other students?	3	5	3	3	5	3
In terms of grade-level expectations, this child's skills in **reading** are:	3	4	4	3	3	3
In terms of grade-level expectations, this child's skills in **mathematics** are:	4	4	3	3	3	3
This child's **overall motivation** to succeed academically is:	4	5	4	3	3	3
This child's **parental encouragement** to succeed academically is:	4	4	3	5	3	4
This child's **intellectual functioning** is:	5	4	3	3	4	3
This child's **overall classroom behaviour** is:	5	5	3	5	4	5
TOTAL	**38**	**39**	**30**	**31**	**32**	**29**

Child 2 had the highest score of 39 with ratings of between 4 and 5. This child also had high social skills scores by both the teacher and the parent. The problem behaviour skills for this child were the second lowest in the group. There was consistency in all the three ratings for Child 2. Child 4 had the lowest scores of the Problem behaviour (8 and 5) and amongst the highest scores of the social skills (29 and 32). His score of the academic competence was equally good (31). There was therefore consistency in as far as the ratings of this child were concerned.

The highest scores of 38 and 39 were obtained by boys, and the lowest scores of 29 and 30 were obtained by girls. This implied that boys were academically stronger than girls.

6.7.3 Analysis of academic competence ratings: Province B

Analyses of academic competence items for children in Province B are presented in Table 6.8. The same benchmark for assessment as outlined above was used for interpreting the results of the rating scale in Province B.

Table 6.8: Academic competence scores: Province B

	Preschooled children			Home children		
	Child 7/B	Child 8/B	Child 9/G	Child 10/B	Child 11/G	Child 12/G
The **overall academic performance** of this child is:	3	3	5	1	1	3
In **reading**, how this child compares with other students	2	5	5	1	1	5
In **mathematics**, how this child compares with other students	2	3	3	1	1	2
In terms of grade-level expectations, this child's skills in **reading** are:	3	5	4	1	1	3
In terms of grade-level expectations, this child's skills in **mathematics** are:	3	4	5	1	1	2
This child's **overall motivation** to succeed academically is:	3	5	4	2	1	3
This child's **parental encouragement** to succeed academically is:	3	5	5	1	1	3
This child's' **intellectual functioning** is:	2	5	5	2	1	3
This child's **overall classroom behaviour** is:	2	3	5	1	1	4
TOTAL	**23**	**38**	**41**	**12**	**9**	**28**

Results suggest that preschooled children had higher levels of academic competence than home children for each item, with more preschooled children being rated in the top 10%, next highest 20% and middle 40% of the class than home children. Two preschooled children (Child 4 and Child 6) were rated in the top 10% or 20% of their class for many items (scores of 5 and 4) . Home children were typically rated in the bottom 10% of the class on most items. Only one home child was rated in the top 10% or 20 % for any item. The range of total academic scores was greater for preschooled children (23 to 41) with a difference between highest and lowest scores of 18, compared with a difference of 16 between highest and lowest scores for home children. However, the two children with the highest levels of academic competence had attended preschool and the two with the lowest scores had come to school

directly from home. This suggests that preschool children were performing better than home children. It cannot be said categorically that girls are top achievers as Child 9 (girl) received the highest score and Child 11 (girl) received the lowest score of the six children. No clear pattern can be drawn between the girls' and boys' performance.

6.7.4 Comparison of teacher-rated academic competence in both provinces

When comparing total teacher ratings of academic competence across the two schools in both provinces (Tables 6.9) preschooled children in both provinces had higher levels of academic competence than home children.

Table 6.9: Total Academic competence scores across provinces
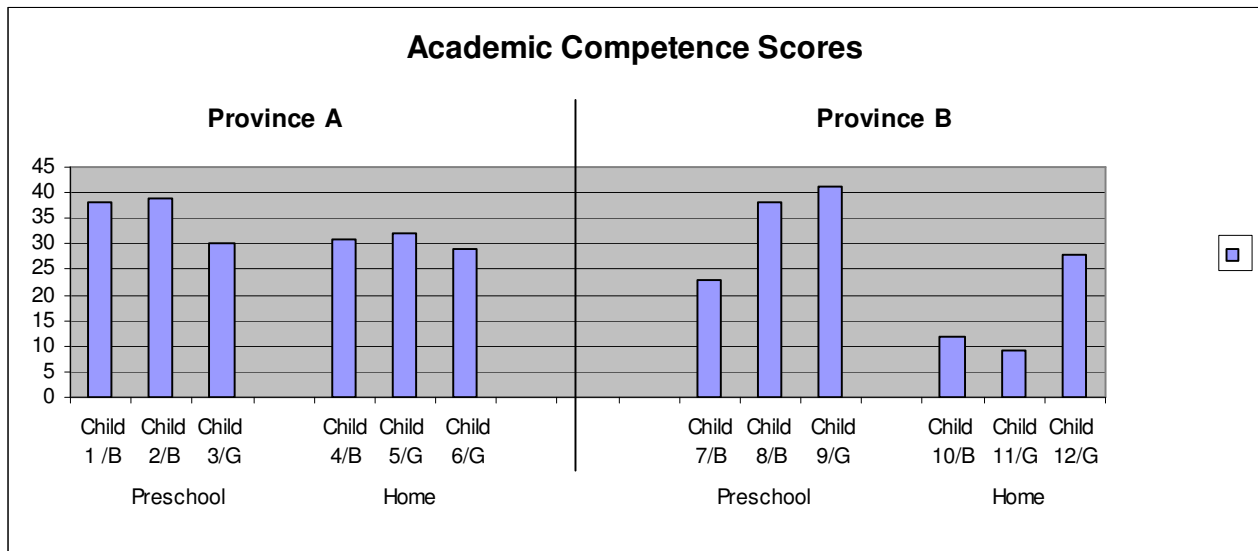
Province B case study children were more frequently in the middle 40% to lower 10% of the class. There was also less discrepancy in the academic competence of children in Province A compared with Province B, and children in Province A generally had higher levels of academic competence than children in Province B. However, a child in Province B received the highest score for academic competence (41) as compared to a high of 39 for Province A. Consistent gender differences within and between provinces are difficult to determine; girls in each province received both the highest

and lowest total academic competence scores for preschooled children and for home children.

6.8   CONCLUSION

In both Provinces children who attended preschool generally had higher levels of teacher-rated social skills and academic competence than children who had not attended preschool. One preschool child and one home child in each province appeared to have difficulty adjusting to school in terms of higher levels of teacher-rated problem behaviours (total scores between 15 and 22). Preschooled children in both Province B and Province A appeared to have lower levels of problem behaviours than home children with the exception of child 1 and child 7 both of whom are preschooled.

The teacher-rated social skills and academic competence total scores for case study children in Province A showed less variation than the scores for children in Province B, and the problem behaviour total scores of preschooled children in Province A showed less variation than those of preschooled children in Province B.

Of significance also is the level of adjustments made by some children who had never gone to preschool. Their parents in an interview with them emphasised that they helped their children with reading and writing and also prepared them to be emotionally ready for participating in formal schooling.

Children in the two provinces differed in their academic competence. Province A scores were much higher than the Province B scores The reason for this significant difference may be at what is understood as the level of competence in the two classes. The measuring yardstick might be different from one classroom to another. This is an important contextual consideration and must be noted when using rating scales such as the SSRS. The contexts also determine the degree to which children

were capable of making adjustments in the classroom including the expectations of teachers.

In Chapter Seven the contextual influences of the results of the rating scales are elaborated on. The researcher reflects on the process of the study, and links the findings to the theoretical framework. Recommendations on how transitions can be better facilitated so that children experience them as being positive are set out. Gaps in the data that may necessitate further study are pointed out.

CHAPTER 7

SYNTHESIS AND SIGNIFICANCE IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY, POLICY AND FUTURE RESEARCH ON CHILD TRANSITIONS

7.1   INTRODUCTION

This research presented data on the transition of children from preschool and home contexts into the first grade of primary school. The methods of inquiry included the analysis of pertinent government documents together with semi-structured interviews with education officials, development activists in non-governmental organisations and school principals and teachers on their understanding of transition policies. School and home transition strategies were documented, drawing on case study interviews with school principals, teachers, parents and children. Children's adjustment was measured by both teachers and parents using the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). The diverse perspectives and strategies identified by different stakeholders in transitions were described and specific findings posited on the transition experiences of children in a developing country context.

The context in which the transitions take place is significant in determining how such migration impacts on those who experience this process. In the existing literature, most children in Western contexts had some form of preschool experience prior to starting school. In the context of this study, as already explained, children come from both preschools and home environments (see Chapter One).

The findings from this study are now described and interpreted against theory, and the implications drawn for policy and practice, and indicative lines of further inquiry are presented.

The findings are aligned to the following research questions which framed the study undertaken.

- 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?

This chapter concludes with a separate section or postscript offering reflections on methodological learning that resulted from this intensely personal research experience.

7.2 POLICY PROVISION AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF TRANSITION POLICY AMONG STAKEHOLDERS: ALIGNMENT OR DISCREPANCY

This study interrogated policy documents to find if transition policies are being addressed and the extent to which they are being integrated in schools. The questions that framed the data collection were:

- 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?

The study revealed that in South Africa, despite policy positions addressing transitions being available (White Paper No. 5 on ECD, 2001a; RNCS, 2002), they do not specify exactly how transitions should be planned and implemented. There appears to be a lack of concrete mechanisms by which these policies are filtered down to practitioners who have to apply them. Furthermore, it appears the school staff themselves are unaware of policies governing their working lives, and the policies are not given prominence they deserve, and that implementation and monitoring systems are not well established.

When asked about who is supposed to inform schools about new policies, the DOE official delineated the responsibility according to the hierarchical order of governance. The responsibility of implementation accordingly was accorded to the district offices. The DOE official assumed the responsibility for distributing policies to schools, but whether they were used or not she could not confirm. The directorate in which she was attached was responsible for the development of policy and guidelines for ECD and the coordination and support of ECD centres and personnel. Her role within this directorate was to ensure the implementation of White Paper No. 5 on ECD.

Darling-Hammond (1998) argued that for policies to be effective they should not only be distributed, but should be discussed and explained fully with the end-users so that the aim of the policymaker is realised. McLaughlin supports this view by maintaining that "policy depends on how policy is interpreted and transformed at each point in the process and finally on the response of the individual at the end of the line" (1998:72). The schools in this study indicated their lack of awareness of transition policies and that training in the RNCS was not sufficient for them to do the work required. In most

cases the schools devised their own strategies suitable to deal with own context which were not derived from the national policies.

Sehoole (2001), following Darling-Hammond, expounded reasons that lead to policy failure and amongst them is that policy makers in a developing country like South Africa do not embark on "policy literacy" to make certain that policies are understood among practitioners. In order for policy to take effect, policy makers must "build capacity for and commitment to the work required, rather than assuming that edict alone will produce new practice" (Darling-Hammond, 1998:647). Policies left to the devices of people may not even take off as initially intended, but may be reinvented in a myriad of unforeseen and even harmful ways by end-users working under very specific local conditions.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), expounds four layers of influence on the developing individual. The third layer, the exosystem, consists mainly of policies which influence how transition should be experienced. In the case of this study, policies do exist, but their influence is very minimal if at all felt. The exosystem layer which is important in laying rules on how transition should be experienced is not effective in terms of influence – hence the lack of knowledge and awareness of policies by teachers. It is recommended that educational 'policy literacy' becomes a priority in South Africa to ensure policy enactment.

• The understanding of Grade R

Issues around the purpose of Grade R came to the fore in the course of this study. This became an area of contention between the government and stakeholders. The DOE official in addressing this issue expressed her directorate's dilemma in as far as the placement of the Grade R classes was concerned. Were they better off in preschools or attached to primary schools? If left in preschools, who was going to monitor their progress as preschools fell outside the governance structure of the government? Most of these classes (subsidised by the government) are now attached to primary schools. The NGO officials did not support this stance by the government

as they felt that their scope of influence was being eroded with the shifting of Grade R to primary schools. Despite this they lauded the establishment of Grade R as a positive step towards addressing problems brought about by lack of readiness to learn.

7.3 TRANSITION STRATEGIES DEPLOYED BY SCHOOLS IN ADDRESSING TRANSITION AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GRADE R

The study enquired about transition strategies used by schools and whether these showed any continuum between what they were practicing and what transpired in preschools. The questions which were instrumental in data collection were, and guided this sub-section on schools' transition strategies:

- 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?

Given that schools were seemingly unaware of government policies associated with school transition, which according to White paper No. 5 on ECD of 2001 is supposed to be on a continuum with the Grade 1 curriculum, this study found that schools developed their own transition strategies. These varied considerably according to what was perceived as important in their own context, and depending on the nature of the relationship between the school and the preschool.

Province A teachers perceived insignificant differences between preschool children and home-school children when they entered formal schooling. Province B teachers, on the other hand, lauded the considerable impact the preschools had on children entering formal education. They viewed the difference between preschooled and

home children as significant and that it impacted on the manner in which children make adjustments and learn in Grade 1.

The difference in the perception of teachers in the two provinces as expressed in the interviews may have resulted from the differential treatment of ECD in the two different governments of these provinces.

ECD in Province A for urban black South Africans was largely in the hands of NGOs and community structures. That is, the apartheid government completely neglected ECD in these areas. Moreover, the education of ECD teachers/practitioners was not regulated so that anyone without prescribed qualifications could take charge of an educare centre. A large number of educare centres still exists outside the government's regulatory framework. The purpose of these centres is merely custodial and not educative.

ECD in Province B initially developed along the same lines as in Province A. But in the early 1980s the then homeland government, where Province B is presently located, established a new regulatory framework so that ECD was controlled by this rural-based government. This meant that the training of teachers/practitioners and the subsidisation of these ECD centres were the responsibility of the homeland government. Teachers/practitioners were also paid by the government. Some preschools in the Province B are still being subsidised by the government, and thus far it is still the only province which has upheld this system of governance and control. However, not all preschools are part of this practice as they are not within the subsidy framework of the government. The practice in these subsidised preschools seems to have been replicated and had significant influences on the smaller and unsubsidised ones.

Despite these differences in the perceptions of teachers in the two provinces, they agreed that transition programmes are imperative to help the child adjust in a school environment for successful learning to take place. Margetts supports transition

programmes as dealing with impacts associated with transition thus minimising the adjustments required for success in the first year of schooling (Margetts, 2002).

The most important transition strategies identified by the practitioners in the two provinces were:

- In-house strategies such as bringing children to school at the end of their preschool education or the beginning of the year in which they start school as an important way in which to familiarise children with the new environment.

- Visiting preschools at the end of the year which acknowledges that a relationship with preschools is a necessity and has to be nurtured.

- Emphasising the importance of parental support which acknowledges the importance of the role played by parents in their children's education.

The above strategies are highlighted in the transition literature as amongst the most efficient in settling children in a school (Taal, 2000; Dockett and Perry, 2001 and Cleave *et al*, 1982)

Teachers indicated that they developed their own transition strategies in the absence of established school strategies. Some of these strategies such as orientation of both parents and children are similar to what has been espoused by literature. Most of the transition strategies gleaned from literature involved the whole school and not just teachers involved with the reception of Grade 1 children (Corsaro and Molinari, 2005). In this study principals were said not to be involved in the day-to-day experiences of transitions by children. Teachers consulted with colleagues to help deal with difficult cases of adjustments.

While schools do visit preschools at the end of the year prior to children's commencing school, other contact is very limited. The contact between preschools

and primary schools regarding the curriculum and philosophies underpinning teaching, which is highlighted and promoted by government policies (White paper No.5 on ECD, 2001) is almost non-existent. Schools are not aware of what is being done in preschools, nor are they aware of the assumed continuity between the preschool and primary school. The literature (Yeboah, 2002); Schweinkart and Weikart, 1998) concur with the findings of the study when they allude to the fact that the lack of cohesion between the preschool and primary school lie in the historical differences between the two institutions. The Ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner expounds and highlights the importance of interrelationships between different settings, and most especially between the preschool and the primary school for smooth transitions to occur (Dunlop and Fabian, 2002). However this relationship seem not to be possible all the time.

This is not a problem experienced only by schools where the study was conducted but was noted by Cleave *et al.* (1982:110) in relation to British schools:

> "Reception teachers have no more than a vague idea which preschool new entrants have attended, even when there is a nursery unit attached to their own school. We found that some of our sample schools had absolutely no contact with any preschool provision in their area, nor did they want to."

Similarly, a more recent study in Iceland declared that teachers failed to understand that Grade R and Grade 1 were on a continuum rather than discrete experiences and recommended that contact between teachers of Grade R and Grade 1 needed to be strengthened (ELRU, 2004:7).

The primary school principals in this study accorded very little significance to preschools – only one principal with Grade R as part of her establishment spoke highly of the preschool phase as a critical foundation for formal education. This attitude was also echoed by children when they associated preschools with eating and sleeping and primary schools with serious work such as reading and writing.

Of notable importance also is the debilitating effect poverty had on the adjustment of children. Teachers explained that poverty had a tendency of undermining the good work they delivered in response to the adjustment needs of children. This is an important area that needs attention and further study to determine the impact of poverty on learning and teaching.

Teachers in the two provinces noticed the significant role of preschools for the transition of children to school. The extent to which this influence was felt varied from one province to another. The teachers in Province/school B were vociferous in according the importance of preschools on the adjustment of the child. The Province/school A teachers on the other hand did not perceive preschools as highly important on the adjustment of children. The difference in the ECE history of the two provinces might be contributing towards the difference in perspectives in as far as the influence and impact of preschools have on the child. The preschools within the context whereby this study was conducted are mainly home-based centres which are poorly resourced, with children crowded in small classrooms which barely have enough space to move around.

Most of the home-based preschools are characterised by ill-trained teachers, lack of resources and ill-motivated teachers (sometimes these teachers can go for months without a salary). These settings as explained above can have detrimental effect on the child's preparedness for formal schooling. Despite the poor conditions of the preschools, children from these centres have shown more adaptation skills for school than home children.

The importance of supporting children having difficulty adjusting to school is noted by Raban (2001), who suggests that children growing up in disadvantaged or non-supportive settings can adjust well to the demands of school and become successful with thorough intervention by the teacher. Despite the fact that some children came from home or attended under resourced preschools, a teacher in Province /school B indicated that it is the amount of effort put into integrating children into the classroom

that pays off. This became evident in a classroom in Province /school B whereby the teacher dedicated more time to those struggling with settling in. At the end of my stay at the school, there was very insignificant difference between those coming from preschool and those coming from home.

Schools are aware that it is critical for them to establish links with preschools. The Province B/ school B indicated that such a relationship does exist between itself and the preschool, even if it does not include curriculum matters. The ecological theory highlights the importance of relationship between the children's immediate settings in influencing how transition should be made. Recognising the importance of relationships and even entering into the relationships is an important step towards a joint influence in how transition is being negotiated.

7.4 PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN AND CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS TRANSITIONS

In this study, parental participation and their strategies in settling children in school was explored. The following questions were key in gaining access to the data:
- What are the transition strategies deployed by home for Grade 1 learners?
- How do parents understand and articulate transition strategies encountered by Grade 1 learners?

The children's transitions were confirmed as being important by government and NGO officials, teachers and the children themselves. Indeed, the literature on transitions also acknowledges parental contributions are crucial to the children's smooth transition to school (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Corsaro & Molinari, 2005; Griebel & Niesel, 2002) In the study by Cleave *et al*, (1982) schools emphasised the importance of parents in the education of their children and regarded the information obtained from parents as more important than the profiles provided from preschools. Teachers also commended the participation of parents as helpful in the adjustment of children.

Parents in the present study felt that it was their responsibility to prepare their children for school even though some of these children had attended preschool. This preparation mainly emphasised teaching children academic skills as parents feel these skills are important in adjusting and learning in the classroom. Social and emotional skills were rarely mentioned except when parents were probed. This is not uncommon as studies by Clarke and Sharpe (2003) on Singaporean children's transitions to school revealed the same concern amongst parents, viz. that academic skills were important for children going to school for the first time. While less of a focus for parents, socio-emotional and behavioural skills have been found to be more important in helping the child settle in a class than academic skills (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

Suggestions have been made that the low socio-economic background of parents undermines parenting and does not always cater for the children's needs (Senosi, 2004; Moletsane, 2004). In contrast and despite their low socio-economic status, parents in this study felt the need to help their children with their schooling. The role of family members was also noted by children who singled out parents and older siblings as being responsible for familiarising them with the school context. The reason may be that since they are always in contact with children they could more easily recall the latest interaction with their parents than with their teachers about what to expect on entrance to the school.

Despite the family's low socio-economic standing, parents have shown keenness to support their children during their transition to school. In studies conducted the views of children about primary schools was said to have largely been influenced by the views of parents or older siblings (Clarke and Sharpe, 2003). Ramey and Ramey (1998) reported that parents of Head Start a project involved with primary school children from disadvantaged backgrounds, despite their poor background participated in school activities and even volunteered in their children's schools. This implies that if

parents are given support, they tend to be supportive to their children, despite the fact that they come from poor backgrounds.

7.5 THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN

Children were interviewed on their experiences in as far as transition is concerned. The researcher wanted to find out about children's experiences in preschool and how these experiences are valued as important to what is being done in Grade 1. The key question which framed this section of the study was:

- How do **children** understand and articulate transition?

Recognising children's voices is to acknowledge their influence in shaping how transitions are being made. The ecological theory states that the process of transition is bi-directional and reciprocal (Mayer, 2004) The child influences and at the same time is influenced by the settings in which he/she finds him/herself. To view transition as though it is happening on the child only is to deny the child the right of being in a reciprocal process.

Children in the study proclaimed their happiness about leaving preschools. They viewed preschools as places of play and eating and that what they acquired was not through teaching but as a result of their own effort. This is not erratic as children in the transition literature also viewed schools as places where learning was to take place and that no learning took place at the preschools (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000 cited in Einarsdóttir, 2003). In the current study, this view most likely reflects the poor physical environments of the preschools and community attitudes. Schools were seen as places where children's future would be decided upon. School could eventually help children earn good money so that they could build houses and buy cars for their parents.

7.6   CHILDREN'S LEVEL OF ADJUSTMENT AS MEASURED BY THE SSRS

The level of children's ability to adjust to formal schooling was measured by using the SSRS. The findings of this rating scale will be discussed under the various sub-domains. While the small sample sizes for each province were small and findings cannot be assumed to be representative of the school populations from which they were drawn, some trends require attention.

- Social Skills Ratings

The ratings in both provinces indicated that preschooled children received higher total social skills scores than home children. Girls tended to have higher scores than boys. There was less variation noted between Province A children's total scores and Province B's total scores. There were more similarities and consistencies with total scores for preschooled children which were higher than for home children across the provinces. These findings reflect those of Margetts (2002) who found that children cared for at home and who did not attend child care or preschool services in the year before school were more likely to have difficulties adjusting to school. Parent ratings across the provinces tended to be higher than the teachers'. The difference may be attributed to contextual factors including expectations between the home and the school. The school functions within a more structured framework. The home, on the other hand, has no defined programme to follow. Entwistle and Alexander (1998) attribute the difference between the teacher and the parent ratings to children at home being rated in terms of how well they perform against own record, whereas at school they are rated to how well they perform against others.

In comparing preschooled children with home children, results suggest that preschooled children have better social skills that enable them to adapt in a new environment. Preschooled children were rated higher than home children by both parents and teachers.

- Problem Behaviours

Preschooled children appeared to have fewer teacher-rated problem behaviours than home children. In comparing teacher and parent ratings for all children, teachers generally rated children with fewer problem behaviours than parents. This contrasted with the ratings for social skills where parents typically rated children with higher levels of social skills at home. As with social skills, children's behaviour ratings are likely to be context dependent. There was less discrepancy between teacher and parent ratings for children in Province A and teachers in Province B reported lower levels of problem behaviours at school than teachers in Province A. Gender differences could not be clearly identified. The literature studied expounds different views mentioned by children that they deem important to know before going to formal school. One of the things mentioned by children in a Starting School Research Project conducted by Dockett and Perry (2002b) was that school rules are very important to know for good adjustment to school. Children have therefore elevated school rules above all else – hence their good behaviour in school as compared to the home.

- Academic Competence

In both provinces, preschooled children generally received higher ratings for academic competence than home children. Overall, children in Province A were rated higher than children in Province B. Results for Province A indicated that children were rated in the middle 40% to top 10% of the class while children in Province B were mainly in the middle 40% to lower 10% of the class. There was also less discrepancy in the academic competence of children in Province A compared with children in Province B. .

Children in Province B who were rated with low levels of social skills had low levels of problem behaviour (good adjustment) and low levels of academic competence (children no. 10 and 11). This needs further study for investigation to find out what causes this low level of adjustment especially in connection with the social skills and the academic competence. Is this reflective of the home or school context?

Differences in children's adjustment may be a result of historical differences in ECD provision in the two provinces as explained in Chapter one and the diverse nature of the communities where these schools are situated which makes it difficult for all children to follow the language of instruction, as some children come from households where the language of instruction is not the home language. It was difficult to make the same assessment in regard to boys' as against girls' performance as the scores were not conclusive. The same conclusion was reached by Margetts (2002) who noted that gender predicted mainly social and behavioural skills but not academic performance.

Given some of the findings of the SSRS it can be recommended that children with lower levels of social skills and higher levels of problem behaviour be identified and strategies be implemented to support these children. Teachers should be equipped with knowledge and skills to settle in children and should not be left to their own devices. Given the high levels of academic and social skills ratings of preschool children, the significance of enrolling children in preschools prior to starting school should be emphasised and supported and monitored by the government to ensure that policies supporting the implementation of Grade R are carried out. The Committee for Economic Development (2006) in its investigation of the effects of quality preschool education reported that "preschool programs for all children is a cost effective investment that pays dividends for years to come and will ensure our states' and our nations' future economic productivity" (ix). The above supports preschool education as a weapon to address all ills related to early dropout, dependency on social welfare grant and inability to achieve acceptable academic performance.

That preschool children made better adjustments than home children-this suggests that preschools had an influence in the way in which children made adjustments in primary schools. Attention should therefore be focussed towards improving and promoting preschool provision in order to harvest its benefits, such as good adjustment to schooling.

7.7 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY TO NEW KNOWLEDGE ON TRANSITIONS

The study makes a modest contribution to understandings and conceptions of school transitions of children in a developing country context. Pulled together, these are the key findings of this research:

The critical and key finding of this study is that policies formulated with good intention of smoothing to-school transitions are not known or familiar to the final interpreters of those policies. Teachers and school principals were not aware of the policies that impact on children's transitions, nor were they aware of the intended continuity between preschool and primary school. Policy documents exist on transitions but are not known by those who have to use them. If policies are to be effective, policy literacy should be embarked upon for the users and strategies for informing key persons about the policies and for implementing and monitoring them should be developed to ensure that policy takes effect where it is supposed to. School in-house transitions strategies are also not informed by government policies but instead by contingent needs as they arise in the school context. This became apparent due to lack of knowledge of the policies by the users. The RNCS training also came under the spotlight. The training according to teachers was not sufficiently intensive to make a difference to what they are supposed to do. Monitoring system needs to be put in place to identify those teachers incapable of implementing the new curriculum and providing them with necessary help to elevate their proficiency to be on the acceptable level.

Further findings are noted below:

- There were noticeable difference in perspectives held by the stakeholders on their understanding of transition. Teachers felt that they were in most cases left to their own devices to help children settle in the classroom. They felt that the principal should be key in helping them together with the Department of

Education, particularly with children with adjustment difficulties. The National Department of Education in turn laid the responsibility of policy implementation at the doorstep of the provinces, and that the facilitation of transition was therefore the provincial responsibility. Schools on the other hand were not aware of the services they were supposed to get from the district offices, hence they did not request for any help. Since none of the stakeholders wanted to take responsibility for facilitating transitions, it became the responsibility of the schools, especially Grade 1 teachers to settle in children in their new environment.

- According to the results of the SSRS it was noted that the preschool had significantly higher impact on formal education. This experience was almost equal with the scores in both Province A and B clearly citing preschool as having significant influence on the adjustment of children. Both provinces rated preschool children as having superior social skills and academic competence as compared to the home children. The SSRS instrument confirmed that preschool children have better social and adaptive behaviours skills than children who did not go to preschool. This rating scale showed that preschool children were more adept in adjustment in the class and that they had an advantage over the home children.

- Government officials, principals, teachers and parents all agreed that the participation of each of these key players in children's transitions is important for the subsequent learning experiences of the child. All singled out the importance of parental involvement in the success of transitions. This was also articulated by children during an interview when they claimed that parents and siblings were the first people to tell them about schooling.

- Teachers claimed that their efforts to help children adjust to the classroom were nullified and compromised by poverty. The impact of poverty, which is very high, is detrimental to educational interventions of teachers. The White Paper

No.5 on ECD with its priority on the implementation of Grade R, was also aimed at targeting children from poor backgrounds so that they started school ready to learn. The White Paper No.5 also recognised the debilitating nature of poverty in that it undermined any productive learning. Moletsane (2004) in her study of township high school teenage boys by using the Roscharch scale acknowledged the negative effect poverty had on parenting and learning and this is manifested in the parents apparent lack of interest in their children's education.

- Schools were perceived by children as places that can lead to an affluent type of life. This view, which was echoed by a large number of children, is an extension of the school as the place of equipping one with knowledge and skills. Going to school held hope for children as an escape route out of poverty. Poverty was seen to be perpetuated by lack of schooling-thus going to school held a promising future for the children.

7.8   THE THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The theoretical framework expounded earlier (Chapter Three) was critical in how this study understood transitions. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory views a child as a situated being who impacts and is impacted upon by various factors that shape their development. This approach was evident in the responses of the interviewees when they declared that transitions are not shaped by a single source, but a combination of factors was responsible in how children experience and traverse this as positive or negative. Bronfenbrenner (1979) agrees that the context in which transitions take place is imperative in how the child experiences the process. This perception of transitions together with their preparations was to some degree what underlined the understanding of the key players in transition. Without good preparations nothing good will come out of the transition process. Policy implementation, when ignoring "policy literacy" of those who have to implement

policies, is in contradiction to the ecological theory which emphasises the importance of policies on how transition should be experienced.

Government and NGO officials, principals and schoolteachers have alluded to the importance of the collective effort by all those concerned with the well-being of the child in making transitions successful. Instead of viewing transition as a well-defined process they acknowledge the difficulty of the process.

Children are shaped and understood within their own context-and this makes them different from other children. This notion of a globalised childhood was discounted in this study and a narrower and more contextual understanding of the child was adopted. Transition as a process was understood within the context in which this study took place and within the understanding of childhood held by those who help the child in making those transitions.

Transitions are conceptualised as life markers or rites of passage. A rite of passage marks a turning point in one's life and thus it affects the socio-emotional development of an individual.

7.9   IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Transitions are not an event but a process. Transitions start long before the child starts schooling. Programmes from as early as when the child starts preschool should promote the eventual entrance of a child into a primary school. As noted by Glazier (2001), transition programmes should operate over a longer time, i.e. they may operate over a term, or even throughout the first year for them to be effective. Parents who visited the schools on regular basis felt quite confident that their children were in good hands. According to research (Richardson, 1997) the parents' initial contact with the school and their cooperation and involvement has implications for the child's long-term educational progress.

Teachers/practitioners should also be made familiar with curriculum guidelines of their own phase and the ones lower than what they teach to ensure that they have an impact into how adjustments are made in class. Given the lack of official curriculum and programmes to be followed for the pre-Grade R children it therefore becomes even more imperative that schools establish their own in-house strategies to help children settle in. Since schools are the ones handling the child on his/her entry to school, they therefore have to take the initiative of establishing transition programs rather than wait for the government to do so.

The literature recognises the importance of parental support in transitions (Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Korkatsch-Groszko, 1998). Transition programmes would not be complete if they left out the parents. Consultation with the parents and working together with them should be uppermost in transition programmes. Dockett and Perry (2001:32) say in support of involving parents in their children's transitions, that "families know their children well and can provide a great deal of valuable input to transition programs". They further state that "the power relations encountered as families and schools interact are potent forces and need to be acknowledged", and that "significant changes need to be made in order for such power relationships to move towards equality" (Dockett & Perry, 2001:32). Children are able to change their attitudes if they realise that their parents contribute to and are accepted by the school. A relationship of trust should be established between the school and parents before the parents are able to share their needs and expectations with the school. An unwelcoming school environment will drive parents away, and it will have negative consequences for the adaptation of children. It is therefore important for schools to build on the positive attitude by parents for children's learning and utilise it for the benefit of children.

Children's relationships with others are central to children's early experiences at school. "Warm and supportive relationships with teachers can provide children with protective factors that buffer them from negative effects of early experiences" (Cory, 2001:1). Creating a secure and warm classroom will make children less anxious

about starting school and more trusting of the teacher and the school. Establishing relationships with peers in the classroom assures the child of stability and a less threatening and hostile environment. Children are said to thrive in a classroom if they have friends. This is an important point for the teacher to note and promote in the class. The province B teacher explained that she seated the preschooled children with the home children, and that this produced good results as children learn from one another. Children should be made to feel as comfortable as possible for any learning to take place. If it means seating children with friends this should be pursued by all means, as the Province B indicated.

Children should be familiarised with the new setting by deliberate intervention in a form of a programme designed towards addressing such insecurity. A programme needs to be developed in conjunction with parents and other interested and concerned key players in transitions that will address key skills deemed important in adjusting to a Grade 1 class. Parents being the first educators of children possess valuable knowledge regarding their children which can be useful to schools (Pianta & Cox, 1999; Dockett & Perry, 2001).

Opportunities which define preschool learning should be extended to the first year of formal learning. Teaching and learning in Grade 1 become too formal too quickly so that children are left behind pining to be still in a position of making own decision with regard to their learning. An NGO member had this to say regarding the Grade 1 curriculum; "Why is there a formal approach to the foundation phase? Why shouldn't it be de-formalised so that one is moving up in this way because if you think the development theory, nothing says that children should start learning at a formal way at the age of five or six". Teachers also indicated that children had difficulty in severing ties with the past. Children still wanted to sleep during the day and they wanted to work if they felt up to it. Unfortunately the Grade 1 programme insists on the participation of all children if they are to complete the year successfully. Those children still trapped in the old ways of doing things are likely to fail, as the system does not recognise the learning methods they bring with them. More attention should

be focussed on creating continuity between the preschool and Grade 1. There should be mechanisms put in place to promote collaboration between the two classes even if they are not in the same environment.

The establishment of Grade R in 2001 signalled the new era in South Africa whereby the foundations of education were recognised and acknowledged as important in the child's school career (DOE, 2001a). However it appears that the Grade R itself has not lived up to its promises, simply because the aspirations expounded by the policy on children transiting to Grade 1 were not communicated to the policy implementers. Policy and practice should be implemented, whereby the teachers in both Grade R and Grade 1 are aware of what is happening in each other's class so that continuity in learning and teaching is maintained and that children do not experience an abrupt detachment from the previous setting as they enter formal schooling.

This study has shown significant benefits of preschool attendance for children starting school. To make their starting school experience even more worthwhile, a comprehensive transition program may well contribute to children's adjustment to school. It is recommended that preschool programs or attendance in Grade R are made available to all children prior to commencing Grade 1.

7.10   LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Limitations of this study which curtailed the results of the study to be generalised are noted. One significant limitation was the small number of the case study involving children. The results from this case study could not be generalised to similar situations. To counteract this, a bigger and varied case study should be employed that will enable the researcher to make a generalised conclusions that will be significant to contexts other than the one for the study.

A bigger and a longitudinal study of transitions from Grade 1 to at least Grade 3 is an important task for further research if the sustainability of preschool or home effects

are to be understood over time in the unequal and impoverished contexts of countries like South Africa. How sustainable are in-school interventions that seek to adjust children to formal schooling?

A range of strategies used by teachers and their impact on school adjustments should be studied. The strategies employed to support different cohort of children and parents should be recorded. If children persistently experience difficulties in adjustments despite the fact that different strategies were employed to support their adjustments-reasons should be sought for why the problem persists.

SSRS should be applied at the beginning of the year in which children start with formal education and at the end of the year together with the student scale (rating scale used by the learner to rate his/her adjustment ability). In my study only the parent and the teacher rating scales were used to measure children's social and adaptive behavioural skills related to good adjustment in class. This should be made in order to identify children with adjustment difficulties and to support such children. At the end of the year the rating scale should be administered in order to find out if difficulties have been reduced or eliminated. The learner rating scale should be introduced at the end of the year to see whether children notice any difference in their adjustment abilities.

The SSRS being a normative rating scale for the American society, but the same cannot be ascertained for the South Africa society. A similar tool developed for the South African context could make the results far more reliable and valid than they are at the present moment. To make the rating scale even more user friendly it can be translated into different South African languages. This would limit the number of visits made by the administrator to the homes – as these visits might also lead to the administrator 'imposing her own will upon the parents' thus rendering the results even more unreliable.

Adjustment takes place over time and may not be realised within a short space of time – hence longitudinal studies are needed to trace any changes in the adjustment of children and the reasons for the changes.

7.11   CONCLUSION

Much has been written on preschool to school transitions of children in developed contexts, but very little on those in developing contexts. Factors that impact on this process differ according to the context in which the transitions take place. This study represents an important shift in the focus of research by shedding preliminary light on children's social adjustment and academic learning in a primary school. However, more needs to be done by way of research. For example, what kinds of teachers can best help the child's adjustments, transitions and learning in resource-deprived third world classroom conditions? The transition of children should translate into economic and social benefits for the country. It has to be addressed in a concerted effort by all stakeholders with the government taking the lead. Research has lauded the importance of early childhood education for the development of the economy and in solving the social ills experienced by adults without a good schooling foundation (Committee for Economic Development 'CED', 2006). The CED (2006), commissioned by the USA Federal government to study the effects of quality preschool education, reported that "getting it right from the beginning would leverage all other educational investments". A child who experiences good beginnings will not cost the country financially in terms of repetition and remediation and social support benefits as an adult. This is a challenge to all stakeholders in the children's transitions to make sure that the child's transition into Grade 1 is a positive and worthwhile experience and that it eliminates all other consequent results of ill-adjustments.

POSTSCRIPT: METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

My research experience was filled with exciting and interesting moments, but also low and sad moments. While I am satisfied that the study broadly followed the path outlined in the research design, there were instances where adaptations had to be made to make the study compatible with the contexts in which it was carried out.

When I started with the research I had a full schedule with specific timelines in place. I had well-prepared research questions and was aware of the fact that variables exist that might throw my schedule off track. What I was oblivious to, was the effects of poverty on the morale of teachers and parents. Poverty can undermine the good work done at school; teachers blamed children's lack of learning skills on poverty. I had to adapt my interview schedule to accommodate poverty as an important variable that was likely to have an impact on the findings.

I often found, while conducting my research that some subtle variables came to the fore that threatened to destabilise my study if not heeded. I took it for granted that teachers, having undergone three to four-years of training, would be aware of the education political and policy landscapes that governed their work. This perception was challenged and refuted a number of times as I interacted with teachers in their classrooms and through the interview sessions.

One other thing that struck me as I started with data collection was that all the principals and teachers involved in this study claimed that it was the first time that they were ever involved in a research project. They were quite apprehensive about that-and were not certain about their abilities to carry out the assessment of children using the rating scale. This was the teachers' first time using a measurement scale other than the curriculum-based one. This filled me with doubt and trepidation as to their ability to be objective and to generate valid findings. At times I sensed that they were despondent and reluctant to do the work. At the end of the day I decided to visit

the schools more regularly than I had anticipated so that I was available for any difficulties that might arise.

Sometimes, as the interviews went on, teachers deviated from the schedule to tell me about their dissatisfaction regarding the training of the RNCS and the running of the school. Teachers took this opportunity to air their grievances and confide in me in connection with various other problems besetting them. Teachers generally seemed not to be happy with their working conditions, and this was bound to reflect on their responses in the interview sessions. The fact that teachers questioned some of the regulations of the school and wanted me to take their side unsettled me as I struggled to retain the focus on transitions; I was not there to be a mediator in local conflict situations. I had to tread carefully so that I did not annoy them by appearing to be uninterested in their problems; at the same time, it was important that I remained as neutral as possible.

Most of the parents involved in this study came from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They were either unemployed or were casual workers. Most of them were semi-literate. Their households were large and ranged from four to more than twenty members. Reading is not a pastime activity for this cohort of parents-hence it was unreasonable to expect them to be involved in reading all the time. It was therefore expected that they would not give the rating scales the attention it deserved, and so I made regular visits to their homes. I was obliged to give parents unlimited support and time, which was not budgeted for in the research programme.

Teachers complained that parents (not all) were reluctant participants in the affairs of the schools. On their first invitation to the school to come and meet with the researcher, only three from the Province B came, and two from the Province A. Parents complained about lack of time to visit schools as they were preoccupied with pressing domestic chores. This hesitant behaviour was taken into consideration when analysing data as it reflected on their commitment and honesty in making decisions on their children's development based on the criteria of the rating scale.

Children initially did not feel free to speak to me, especially during our first meetings, but eventually they relaxed after establishing trust with the researcher. As a stranger in a classroom, I had to build the relationship of trust between myself and children in order for me to be accepted. After two months of stay in one classroom the children became used to me. At times when I came in the classroom they would offer to read to me. This kind of trust was achieved after making a number of visits to the class and establishing good rapport with them.

Children did not like to be categorised according to whether they attended preschool or not. I realised that to be categorised as not having attended preschool was a stigma that lived in their minds. This stigma would even result in the child being ridiculed by others. If this was allowed to go on it could affect how children acted and further affect the validity of the findings. This information became the privilege of the teacher and myself, and not children.

The lesson I learnt from this whole process is that qualitative research should not be pursued with too many preconceived ideas on what to expect in contexts far removed from where research designs are clinically composed. I found that research should be conducted with an open mind, and that a new researcher should be ready to deal with the unexpected. In the more unpredictable contexts of doing research in poor environments, a research schedule should be flexible and, to some extent, open-ended. The literature review should serve only as background knowledge on what has been found, but it does not provide answers to all contexts. I learnt that before embarking on a study, a novice researcher should familiarise herself with the context and be alert to subtle variables that may derail a study, and include such variables in the heart of the investigation. Careful preparation in relation to understanding the context of the research is important before one commences with the study.

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ADDENDA

SSRS:

SOCIAL SKILLS

PROBLEM BEHAVIOURS

**ACADEMIC COMPETENCE FORMS:
ELEMENTARY**

ADDENDUM A

ADDENDUM A

- **Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). (Elementary Level): Teacher form (Blue)**

- **Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). (Elementary Level): Parent form (Purple)**

Next, read each item on pages 2 and 3 (items 1 - 48) and think about this student's behavior during the past month or two. Decide **how often** the student does the behavior described.

If the student **never** does this behavior, circle the **0**.
If the student **sometimes** does this behavior, circle the **1**.
If the student **very often** does this behavior, circle the **2**.

For items 1 - 30, you should also rate **how important** each of these behaviors is for success in *your* classroom.

If the behavior is **not important** for success in your classroom, circle the **0**.
If the behavior is **important** for success in your classroom, circle the **1**.
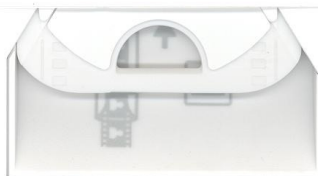If the behavior is **critical** for success in your classroom, circle the **2**.

Here are two examples:

	How Often?			How Important?		
	Never	Sometimes	Very Often	Not Important	Important	Critical
Shows empathy for peers.	0	1	②	0	①	2
Asks questions of you when unsure of what to do in schoolwork.	0	①	2	0	1	②

*This student **very often** shows empathy for classmates. Also, this student **sometimes** asks questions when unsure of schoolwork. This teacher thinks that showing empathy is **important** for success in his or her classroom and that asking questions is **critical** for success.*

Please do not skip any items. In some cases you may not have observed the student perform a particular behavior. Make an estimate of the degree to which you think the student would probably perform that behavior.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY How Often?				Social Skills	How Often?			How Important?		
C	A	S			Never	Sometimes	Very Often	Not Important	Important	Critical
			1.	Controls temper in conflict situations with peers.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			2.	Introduces herself or himself to new people without being told.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			3.	Appropriately questions rules that may be unfair.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			4.	Compromises in conflict situations by changing own ideas to reach agreement.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			5.	Responds appropriately to peer pressure.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			6.	Says nice things about himself or herself when appropriate.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			7.	Invites others to join in activities.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			8.	Uses free time in an acceptable way.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			9.	Finishes class assignments within time limits.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			10.	Makes friends easily.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			11.	Responds appropriately to teasing by peers.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			12.	Controls temper in conflict situations with adults.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			13.	Receives criticism well.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			14.	Initiates conversations with peers.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			15.	Uses time appropriately while waiting for help.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			16.	Produces correct schoolwork.	0	1	2	0	1	2
C	A	S	SUMS OF HOW OFTEN COLUMNS							

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Social Skills (cont.)

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY How Often?					How Often?			How Important?		
C	A	S			Never	Sometimes	Very Often	Not Important	Important	Critical
			17.	Appropriately tells you when he or she thinks you have treated him or her unfairly.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			18.	Accepts peers' ideas for group activities.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			19.	Gives compliments to peers.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			20.	Follows your directions.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			21.	Puts work materials or school property away.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			22.	Cooperates with peers without prompting.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			23.	Volunteers to help peers with classroom tasks.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			24.	Joins ongoing activity or group without being told to do so.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			25.	Responds appropriately when pushed or hit by other children.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			26.	Ignores peer distractions when doing class work.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			27.	Keeps desk clean and neat without being reminded.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			28.	Attends to your instructions.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			29.	Easily makes transition from one classroom activity to another.	0	1	2	0	1	2
			30.	Gets along with people who are different.	0	1	2	0	1	2
C	A	S	SUMS OF HOW OFTEN COLUMNS							

Problem Behaviors

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY How Often?					How Often?			
E	I	H			Never	Sometimes	Very Often	
			31.	Fights with others.	0	1	2	Do not make
			32.	Has low self-esteem.	0	1	2	importance ratings
			33.	Threatens or bullies others.	0	1	2	for items 31 - 48
			34.	Appears lonely.	0	1	2	
			35.	Is easily distracted.	0	1	2	
			36.	Interrupts conversations of others.	0	1	2	
			37.	Disturbs ongoing activities.	0	1	2	
			38.	Shows anxiety about being with a group of children.	0	1	2	
			39.	Is easily embarrassed.	0	1	2	
			40.	Doesn't listen to what others say.	0	1	2	
			41.	Argues with others.	0	1	2	
			42.	Talks back to adults when corrected.	0	1	2	
			43.	Gets angry easily.	0	1	2	
			44.	Has temper tantrums.	0	1	2	
			45.	Likes to be alone.	0	1	2	
			46.	Acts sad or depressed.	0	1	2	
			47.	Acts impulsively.	0	1	2	Go on to
			48.	Fidgets or moves excessively.	0	1	2	Page 4.
E	I	H	SUMS OF HOW OFTEN COLUMNS					

Academic Competence

The next nine items require your judgments of this student's academic or learning behaviors as observed in your classroom. Compare the student with other children who are in the same classroom.

Rate all items using a scale of 1 to 5. Circle the number that best represents your judgment. The number **1** indicates the lowest or least favorable performance, placing the student in the lowest 10% of the class. Number **5** indicates the highest or most favorable performance, placing the student in the highest 10% compared with other students in the classroom.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY			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.	Compared 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 behavior** is:	1	2	3	4	5

AC	SUM OF COLUMN

Stop. Please check to be sure all items have been marked.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

SUMMARY

SOCIAL SKILLS		PROBLEM BEHAVIORS		ACADEMIC COMPETENCE	
HOW OFTEN? TOTAL (sums from p. 2) (sums from p. 3)	BEHAVIOR LEVEL (see Appendix A) Fewer Average More	HOW OFTEN? TOTAL (sums from page 3)	BEHAVIOR LEVEL (see Appendix A) Fewer Average More	RATING TOTAL (sum from page 4)	COMPETENCE LEVEL (see Appendix A) Below Average Above
C + =		E		Total AC	
A + =		I			
S + =		H			
Total (C + A + S)		Total (E + I + H)			
(see Appendix B) Standard Score / Percentile Rank		(see Appendix B) Standard Score / Percentile Rank		(see Appendix B) Standard Score / Percentile Rank	
(see Appendix E) SEM ± / Confidence Level 68% / 95%		(see Appendix E) SEM ± / Confidence Level 68% / 95%		(see Appendix E) SEM ± / Confidence Level 68% / 95%	
Confidence Band (standard scores) to		Confidence Band (standard scores) to		Confidence Band (standard scores) to	

Norms used: ☐ Handicapped ☐ Nonhandicapped

Note: To obtain a detailed analysis of this student's Social Skills strengths and weaknesses, complete the Assessment-Intervention Record.

4

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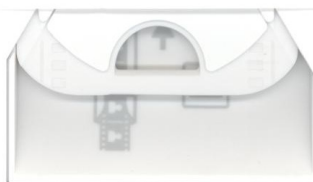
Next, read each item on pages 2-4 (items 1-55) and think about your child's present behavior. Decide **how often** your child does the behavior described.

> If your child **never** does this behavior, circle the **0**.
> If your child **sometimes** does this behavior, circle the **1**.
> If your child **very often** does this behavior, circle the **2**.

For items 1-38, you should also rate **how important** each of these behaviors is for your child's development.

> If it is **not important** for your child's development, circle the **0**.
> If it is **important** for your child's development, circle the **1**.
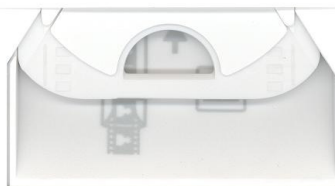> If it is **critical** for your child's development, circle the **2**.

Here are two examples:

	How Often?			How Important?		
	Never	Sometimes	Very Often	Not Important	Important	Critical
Shows a sense of humor.	0	1	②	0	①	2
Answers the phone appropriately.	⓪	1	2	0	1	②

*This parent thought that the child **very often** showed a sense of humor and that showing a sense of humor was **important** to the child's development. This parent also thought that the child **never** answered the phone appropriately and that answering the phone appropriately was **critical** to the child's development.*

There are no right or wrong answers. You may take as much time as you like.
Please do not skip any items.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY How Often?				**Social Skills**	How Often?			How Important?		
C	A	R	S		Never	Sometimes	Very Often	Not Important	Important	Critical
				1. Uses free time at home in an acceptable way.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				2. Keeps room clean and neat without being reminded.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				3. Speaks in an appropriate tone of voice at home.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				4. Joins group activities without being told to.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				5. Introduces herself or himself to new people without being told.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				6. Responds appropriately when hit or pushed by other children.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				7. Asks sales clerks for information or assistance.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				8. Attends to speakers at meetings such as in church or youth groups.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				9. Politely refuses unreasonable requests from others.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				10. Invites others to your home.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				11. Congratulates family members on accomplishments.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				12. Makes friends easily.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				13. Shows interest in a variety of things.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				14. Avoids situations that are likely to result in trouble.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				15. Puts away toys or other household property.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				16. Volunteers to help family members with tasks.	0	1	2	0	1	2
C	A	R	S	SUMS OF HOW OFTEN COLUMNS						

2

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY How Often?					Social Skills (cont.)	How Often?			How Important?		
C	A	R	S			Never	Sometimes	Very Often	Not Important	Important	Critical
				17.	Receives criticism well.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				18.	Answers the phone appropriately.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				19.	Helps you with household tasks without being asked.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				20.	Appropriately questions household rules that may be unfair.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				21.	Attempts household tasks before asking for your help.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				22.	Controls temper when arguing with other children.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				23.	Is liked by others.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				24.	Starts conversations rather than waiting for others to talk first.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				25.	Ends disagreements with you calmly.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				26.	Controls temper in conflict situations with you.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				27.	Gives compliments to friends or other children in the family.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				28.	Completes household tasks within a reasonable time.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				29.	Asks permission before using another family member's property.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				30.	Is self-confident in social situations such as parties or group outings.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				31.	Requests permission before leaving the house.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				32.	Responds appropriately to teasing from friends or relatives of his or her own age.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				33.	Uses time appropriately while waiting for your help with homework or some other task.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				34.	Accepts friends' ideas for playing.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				35.	Easily changes from one activity to another.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				36.	Cooperates with family members without being asked to do so.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				37.	Acknowledges compliments or praise from friends.	0	1	2	0	1	2
				38.	Reports accidents to appropriate persons.	0	1	2	0	1	2

C	A	R	S	SUMS OF HOW OFTEN COLUMNS

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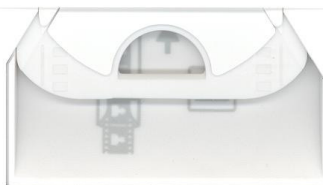
INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

ADDENDUM B

ADDENDUM B

| INTERVIEW SCHEDULE A (1) |
| GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS-NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION |

The purpose of this schedule is to elicit government officials' understanding of policy provision, purpose and the implementation process of transitions from Grade R to Grade 1.

1. What exactly is your role in the department with respect to ECD an ECD policy?

2. How do you understand the relationship between Grade R and Grade 1? In other words since the Grade R is part of the informal education and the Grade 1 is part of the formal education how do you reconcile the two?

3. Throughout the world, the transition to Grade 1 is often regarded as a serious problem which can result in academic failure. What does your Ministry of Education regard as the primary challenges with respect to this transition?

4. What specific policy provisions have been made to deal with problems of transition?

5. If the policy for dealing with transitions does exists, what is the parents' role, especially as they are regarded as the first educators of the child?

6. How effective have these policy provisions been in practice as far as transition problems are concerned? Do you have any evidence of the impact of policy on transitions to school?

7. Are the principals and teachers aware of the policy provision as far as transitions are concerned ? How is this information conveyed to them?

8. If there is no policy provision on transitions, how do principals and   teachers supposed to deal with the transition problems?

9. For those children who never went through Grade R what kind of provision exists for them in Grade1?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE A (2)
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS-DISTRICT OFFICES

The purpose of this schedule is to elicit government officials' understanding of policy provision, purpose and the implementation process of transitions from Grade R to Grade 1.

1.   What exactly is your role in the department with respect to ECD an ECD policy implementation?

2.   How do you understand the relationship between Grade R and Grade 1? In other words since the Grade R is part of the informal education and the Grade 1 is part of the formal education how do you reconcile the two?

3.   To your own knowledge are there any policy provisions on "transitions" from Grade R to Grade 1?

4.   In your own experience, do these policy provisions make any positive impact on the Grade 1 child? Is there any evidence?

5.   What do you think has been left out of these policies that should have been included with respect to transition from Grade R to Grade 1?

6.   What do you think the schools should do to address this gap?

7.   To what extent are schools able to ease transition of children from Grade R to Grade1?

8.   To what extent has the introduction of Grade R eliminated/reduced the transition problems that existed before? Any evidence?

9.   What role do you think the school should play in addressing transition problems?

10.   What role do you think parents should play in "transitions" of their children from Grade R to Grade 1?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE B
NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

The purpose of this schedule is to elicit Non Governmental Organisations' understanding of policy provision, purpose and the implementation process of transitions from Grade R to Grade 1.

1. What exactly is your role in contributing to the ECD policy formulations?

2. .How do you understand the relationship between Grade R and Grade 1? In other words since the Grade R is part of the informal education and the Grade 1 is part of the formal education how do you reconcile the two?

3. What do you think are the principal/main causes of transition problems?

4. To what degree has the government policy on ECD addressed transition problems?

5. Would you say that the introduction of Grade R has reduced or eliminated transition problems that existed before? Any evidence?

6. What do you think has been left out of these policies that should have been included with respect to transition from Grade R to Grade 1?

7. Do the policies articulate the role to be played by the parents in the transitions of children from Grade R to Grade 1?

8. Which domains in the child's life are important if the child has to make good adjustments to school life?

9. In what way do you think the schools should address these domains in order to ensure that each child adapts well to a school situation.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE B (1)
PRINCIPALS

The purpose of this schedule is to understand the implementation of the policy, problems and successes in terms of transition from Grade R to Grade 1.

1. What is your experience of transitions of children from Grade R to Grade 1? How do they manifest themselves in children?

2. What kind of strategies does your school use in easing transition from Grade R to Grade1?

3. To what extent has Grade R contributed towards the success or failure of Grade 1 learning? In what ways?

4. What role does your school play in preparing itself for the Grade 1 child?

5. What kind of relationships do you promote between the Grade 1 class and Grade R class?

6. Is there particular knowledge or skills that you expect the child to possess when coming to school?

7. What kind of social and behavioural skills are acceptable for a child starting Grade 1?

8. What role do parents play in the transition of their children?

9. Are the parents free to consult you with any of their children's problems? What are the most common problems they present to you?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE B (2)
GRADE 1 TEACHERS AND THOSE WITH EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING GRADE1
CLASS

The purpose of this schedule is to understand the implementation of the policy, problems and successes in terms of transition from Grade R to Grade 1.

1.   What are the typical transition strategies used by Grade 1 children in your school?

2.   What do you observe to be the main differences in adjustments between children who went to Grade R and those who did not?

3.   How do you deal with these differences?

4.   Do the transition strategies differ according to whether the child went through Grade R or not? Please elaborate.

5.   Based on your own observation what are the main causes of these differences?

6.   Is there any support that you receive from the government officials in understanding and dealing with transition problems?

7.   To what degree has Grade R contributed towards the success or failure of Grade 1 learning?

8.   Is there particular knowledge or skills you expect the child to possess when coming to school for the first time? Please be specific.

9.   In what way do these knowledge or skills help the child in adjusting to a Grade
        1 class?

10.   What role do parents play in the transition of their children?

11   How would you describe a child who has fully adjusted to a Grade 1 class?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE C
PARENTS

The purpose of this schedule is to explore experiences of parents with regard to their children's transition from Grade R to Grade 1.

1.   How did your child experience the transition from Grade R to Grade1?

2.   What were the main challenges you and your child had to grapple with?

3.   What did you do to make this transition easier?

4.   Are the strategies you adopted effective or not? If not what are you doing about the situation?

5.   What is the school's expectation of your role to be with respect to transition of your child to Grade 1? Do you agree with the role determined for you?

6.   Does your teacher involve you in your child's education? What role do you play?

   a. What is the relationship between you and your child in terms of his/her school work?

7.   What kind of characteristics do you think are important in a child if he has to make good transition to a grade?

8.   How can you describe a child who has fully adjusted to a class

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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE D
CHILDREN

The purpose of this schedule is to explore experiences of children with regard to their transition from preschool and home to Grade 1. Children's perspectives on how they view the preschool and home as against primary school will be captured.

1. What is your name?

2. Where do you stay?

3. Did you go to preschool before coming to school?

4. What do you think of a preschool-is it better than school? In what way?

5. Those coming from home-is the home better than school? In what way?

6. Did you know what to expect when coming to school? Who told you?

7. Did the information help you in settling in the class?

8. Do you miss home or preschool?

9. Do you like the work that you do in Grade1?

10. Is it any different to the preschool or home work? In what way?

11. Do you have anything that you would like to suggest that would make the school better than it is now?

12. Do you have friends in the classroom or school?

13. Are they helpful to you? In which way?

14. Do you like your teacher? Why?

ADDENDUM C

LETTERS OF CONSENT

P O Box 5876
PRETORIA
0001
October 2004

The Principal
Bana Primary School
Mabopane

Dear Colleagues

I would like to thank you sincerely for volunteering your kind assistance with research being undertaken at your school. I would like to conduct my research project at your school with your Grade 1 learners. My research topic is "A study of transition from Grade R to Grade 1". This research project will also involve interviews with teachers, the principal and the parents of the children who will be observed. The information obtained will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for this research purposes only.

This study will involve the observation of children in the classroom. I will also involve the school teachers in identifying children who went through Grade R and those who did not. Children will be chosen based on the profile they bring along from Grade R and from the teachers knowledge of the performance of children in class.

Before commencing with any data collection exercise I will first come to the school and explain the research and what each of the participant's role will be. I will explain in detail the observation forms that teachers have to fill in.

I would like to thank you in assisting me in this research. I hope that the information obtained from this research will benefit you most in identifying transition strategies that can assist children to adjust well to a school situation.

Yours sincerely
N C Phatudi
PhD student
University of Pretoria

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign this letter as a declaration of your consent, i.e. that you participate in this project willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw from the research project at any time. Under no circumstances will the identity of interview participants be made known to any parties/organisations that may be involved in the research process.

Participant's signature...: Date: ....

Researcher's signature ....: Date: ....

Yours Sincerely
Phatudi N C (Mrs)

(*NB: This letter was translated into Setswana and Sepedi*)

P.O. Box 5876
Pretoria 0001
12 June 2004

Dear Parent

I would like to express my deepest appreciation on having agreed to your child to participate in the research project being undertaken at your child's school. This research will entail the observation of your child both inside and outside the classroom to gauge how much has he/she succeeded in adjusting successfully to a Grade 1 class. I would also like to interview you regarding your child's relationship with you, his/her siblings and friends or other people living with you in your household.

I would like to promise you that the information obtained from you will be treated in the strictest confidentiality possible, and it will be used for this research purposes only. Your names will not be revealed instead pseudo names will be used.

The information obtained from this research will be made available to your child's school and can be used by the teacher to help your child or other children in similar situation as your child.

In conclusion I would like to thank you most sincerely in your assistance in this research, and I hope that this research make a contribution of some value in helping teachers understand transition problems and how to eradicate them.

Yours sincerely
N C Phatudi
PhD Student
University of Pretoria

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign this letter as a declaration of your consent, i.e. that you participate in this project willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw from the research project at any time. Under no circumstances will the identity of interview participants be made known to any parties/organisations that may be involved in the research process.

Participant's signature/on behalf of the participant: ……………………………………

Date:..

Researcher's signature ....: Date: ……………………………

Yours Sincerely
Phatudi N C (Mrs)

University of Pretoria

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Fax: (012). 420 5595
E-mail: nkidi@gk.up.ac.za
Department of Early Childhood Education
Faculty of Education

GDE/ MABOPANE APO MANAGER
MABOPANE
10 AUGUST 2004

Dear Sir/Mam

I am a second year PhD student at the University of Pretoria. I would like to seek your assistance in allowing me to undertake a research project in your district to collect data pertaining to my studies in two primary schools.

My research topic is "A study of transition from Grade R and home contexts to Grade 1 in a developing country". This research project will involve the observation of children in Grade1 who went through Grade R and those who did not. It will also involve interviews with teachers, the principal and the parents of the children who will be observed, together with the district officials responsible for ECD. The information obtained will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for this research purposes only.

I will involve the school teachers in identifying children who went through Grade R and those who did not. Children will be chosen based on the profile they bring along from Grade R and from the teachers knowledge of the performance of children in class.

Before commencing with any data collection exercise I will first come to the school and explain the research and what each of the participant's role will be. I will explain in detail the observation forms that teachers have to fill in.

I hope that the information obtained from this research will benefit the schools in identifying children with transition problems and in assisting them to adjust well to a school situation.

Yours sincerely
N C Phatudi
PhD student
University of Pretoria