

## **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**

<b>GRADE R</b>	<b>GRADE 1</b>
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**

<b>GRADE R</b>	<b>GRADE 1</b>
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**

<b>GRADE R</b>	<b>GRADE 1</b>
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,  $\surd$  denotes awareness of the existence of the policy and  $\Omega$  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**

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

- 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**

<b>Parental views on transitions</b>	<b>Total responses</b>	<b>Province A</b>	<b>Province B</b>
<b>Preparation for schooling</b>	<b>16</b>		
Parental guidance		4	3
Sibling		4	3
Friends		2	
<b>Important skills</b>	<b>47</b>		
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
<b>Support for the school</b>	<b>7</b>		
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**

<b>Children’s experiences</b>	<b>Total responses</b>	<b>Province A</b>	<b>Province B</b>
<b>Physical structure</b>	<b>6</b>		
“We know that it is a big building”		3	3
<b>Routine</b>	<b>18</b>		
“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
<b>Fear of the unknown</b>	<b>12</b>		
“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
<b>Relationship with other children</b>	<b>3</b>		
“When I started schooling, the school was full of people and I was afraid of getting in to the school”		3	
<b>Pre-school/ school</b>	<b>21</b>		
“At the crèche <sup>1</sup> they gave us food, we sleep and we play”		6	6
“School is better than crèche”		5	4
<b>Futuristic nature of schools</b>	<b>6</b>		
“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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<sup>1</sup> 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
<b>C</b>	10	12	13	8	7	9	10	12	8	17	13	13
<b>A</b>	9	9	12	17	10	8	9	12	6	15	10	11
<b>R</b>		{7}		{6}		{11}		{14}		{18}		{8}
<b>S</b>	11	4	10	17	12	13	10	18	8	13	9	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>

**Y axis**

C = Cooperation  
A = Assertion  
R = Responsibility  
S = Self-control

**X axis**

T = Teacher ratings  
P = Parent ratings  
B = Boy  
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
<b>C</b>	10	15	16	10	15	15	3	11	3	13	14	14
<b>A</b>	10	15	4	14	18	16	2	14	6	10	14	15
<b>R</b>		{13}		{7}		{17}		{7}		{15}		{14}
<b>S</b>	11	14	9	5	11	15	4	11	4	12	8	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38</b>

**Y axis**

C = Cooperation  
A = Assertion  
R = Responsibility  
S = Self-control

**X axis**

T = Teacher ratings  
P = Parent ratings  
B = Boy  
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.

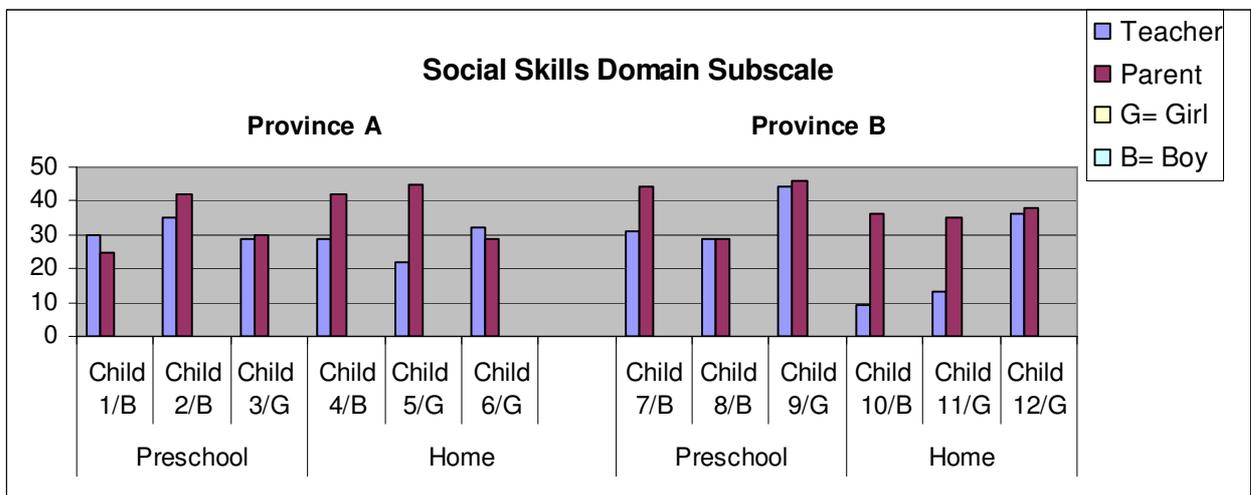
In comparing total social skills scores for boys and girls, it can be seen that girls received higher teacher-rated scores than boys. Preschooled children had higher and generally consistent scores by the teacher and parents.

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), preschool 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 preschool 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 preschool 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
<b>E</b>	2	9	2	8	6	1	2	2	2	12	5	5
<b>I</b>	3	4	5	3	8	9	3	3	3	10	11	7
<b>H</b>	6	3	3	4	3	5	3	0	5	11	6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>

**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
<b>E</b>	5	5	0	2	4	8	1	6	0	5	4	8
<b>I</b>	7	5	0	6	0	8	2	6	7	9	7	5
<b>H</b>	10	6	4	5	1	3	1	16	3	2	4	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>

**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

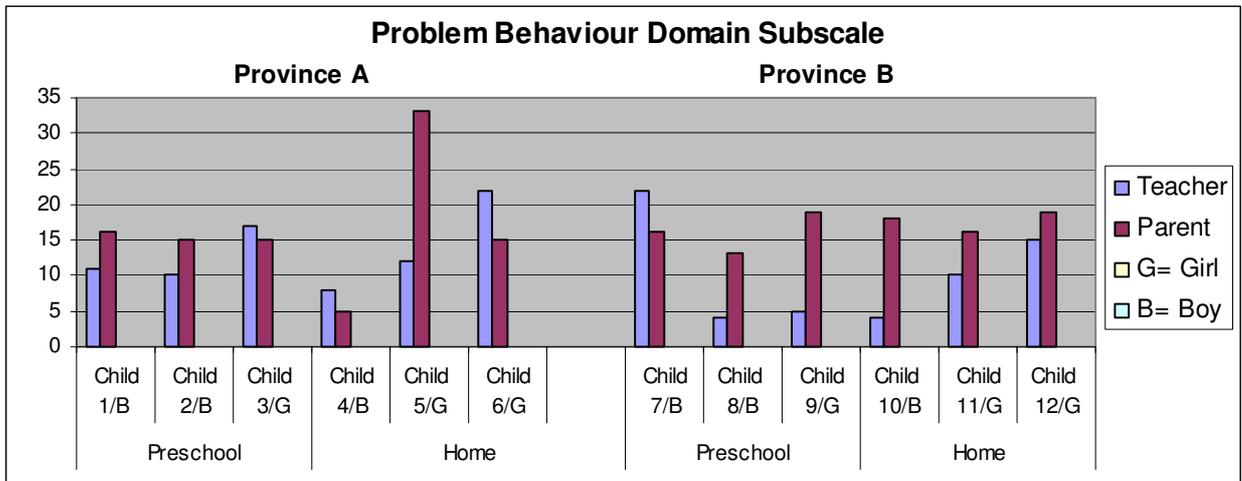
teacher-rated scores being lower than parent-rated scores by 9, 14 and 14 respectively. Reasons for this discrepancy need further investigation and were outside the scope of this particular study. There is a greater range in problem behaviour scores for this group of children (4 to 22) by both the teacher 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 1 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 <b>overall academic performance</b> of this child is:	5	4	3	3	4	3
In <b>reading</b> , how does this child compare with other students?	5	4	4	3	3	2
In <b>mathematics</b> , 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 <b>reading</b> are:	3	4	4	3	3	3
In terms of grade-level expectations, this child's skills in <b>mathematics</b> are:	4	4	3	3	3	3
This child's <b>overall motivation</b> to succeed academically is:	4	5	4	3	3	3
This child's <b>parental encouragement</b> to succeed academically is:	4	4	3	5	3	4
This child's <b>intellectual functioning</b> is:	5	4	3	3	4	3
This child's <b>overall classroom behaviour</b> is:	5	5	3	5	4	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>

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 <b>overall academic performance</b> of this child is:	3	3	5	1	1	3
In <b>reading</b> , how this child compares with other students	2	5	5	1	1	5
In <b>mathematics</b> , how this child compares with other students	2	3	3	1	1	2
In terms of grade-level expectations, this child's skills in <b>reading</b> are:	3	5	4	1	1	3
In terms of grade-level expectations, this child's skills in <b>mathematics</b> are:	3	4	5	1	1	2
This child's <b>overall motivation</b> to succeed academically is:	3	5	4	2	1	3
This child's <b>parental encouragement</b> to succeed academically is:	3	5	5	1	1	3
This child's <b>intellectual functioning</b> is:	2	5	5	2	1	3
This child's <b>overall classroom behaviour</b> is:	2	3	5	1	1	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>28</b>

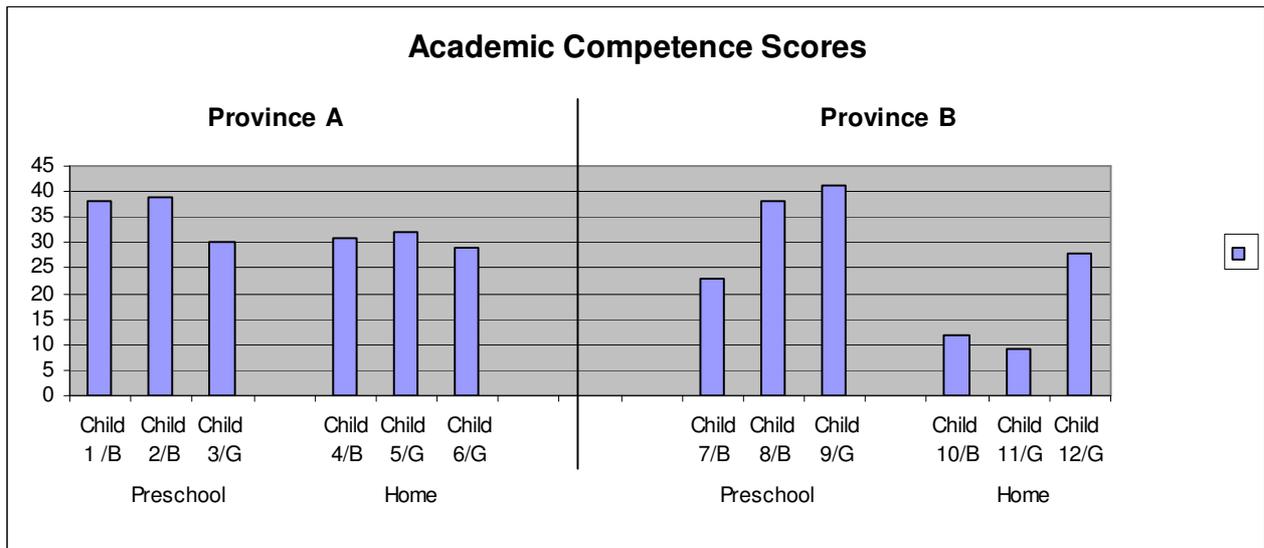
Results suggest that preschooled children had higher levels of academic competence than home children for each item, with more preschooled children being rated in the top 10%, next highest 20% and middle 40% of the class than home children. Two preschooled children (Child 4 and Child 6) were rated in 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.