'Please Miss, I did that before in nursery!'

Achieving curriculum continuity and progression in children's learning across the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence-Early Level from nursery settings to Primary 1.

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A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Education

at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

University of Strathclyde

2018

Declaration

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Abstract

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence-Early Level proposes to provide continuity of curriculum experience for children transitioning from nursery to primary school. Over the last three decades, national and international studies have identified the key factors, which contribute to an effective transition. These studies also highlight some of the emotional, social, and cognitive implications for children starting school.

This study aimed, through case study methods, to explore whether there are barriers and challenges facing practitioners and teachers in achieving curriculum continuity and progression in children's learning across the 'early level'. The study, informed by a bioecological and sociocultural framework, involved thirteen children, their parents and the staff who worked with them in two nursery settings and three primary schools. Findings demonstrate the importance of the environment, proximal processes and reciprocal relationships between people and contexts over time in achieving curriculum continuity across the 'early level'. Furthermore, the study identified the need for collaborative 'early level' curriculum planning systems and playful pedagogies which empower children to exercise agency, and which recognise and build on children's funds of knowledge.

Qualitative data was gathered through participant observations and interviews with adults. Data, analysed using a thematic analysis framework, show that children experienced two '*early level traditions*'. Firstly, they

experienced the 'nursery' *early level tradition* and secondly, on moving to school, they experienced the 'Primary 1' *early level traditio*n. Conceptually, as children left the nursery tradition behind and entered the Primary 1 tradition, they stepped into and out of 'contested' and 'unified' spaces, which are proposed to exist in the mesosystem between the two early level traditions. Consistent with a bioecological and sociocultural frame, children's agency and social capital determine the impact of the contested and unified spaces on their adjustment to being learners in the Primary 1 tradition.

This study argues that, as a result of variations in pedagogical practices in each tradition, there are possibilities for greater collaboration between practitioners and teachers. Further, the importance of building a play-based, child-initiated pedagogy is foregrounded, if children starting school in Scotland, are to benefit from a flexible, socially constructed, continuous 'early level' curriculum experience.

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Glossary of terms

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)   'A service consisting of education and care, of a kind which is suitable in the ordinary case for children who are under school age, regard being had to the importance of interactions and other experiences which support learning and development in a caring nurturing setting' (Building the Ambition, 2014:8).

Education Scotland   An Executive Agency of the Scottish Government, tasked with improving the quality of the country's education system. (educationscotland.gov.uk)

GTCS-General Teaching Council of Scotland   A fee based registered charity and the world's first independent self-regulating body for teaching. (gtcs.org.uk)

Key worker   A practitioner assigned specific responsibility for a group of nursery aged children.

Learner   The term generally used to refer to nursery, primary, special and secondary school pupils and young people. (gtcs.org.uk)

Nursery setting   The service that provides professional, registered childcare and education for children not yet at school. Throughout this thesis I will use the term 'nursery' when referring to the two early learning and childcare settings that the study children attended.

Parent   Should be understood as including foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends. It should be understood as referring to one, two or three significant adults in the parent role. (gtcs.org.uk)

Pedagogy   'Is about the interactions and experiences which support the curriculum and the process of how children learn. This is inseparable from what young children should learn-the content of the curriculum' (Building the Ambition, 2014: 51).

Practitioner Throughout this thesis I refer to the specific member of staff who works with children in the two nursery settings as the 'practitioner'.

Primary 1   The first class children attend after transitioning from nursery to compulsory education.

Teacher   Throughout this thesis I refer to the member of staff who works with children in the four primary one classes as the 'teacher'.

Tradition A tradition is a way of operating that is deeply embedded within the culture of each sector of education. Each 'early level' tradition is shaped from within by the socio-cultural norms, by the behaviours, attitudes and identities, by the differences between the nursery microsystem and the primary school microsystem.

Transition 'leads to changes on an *individual level*-changes in identity, coping with strong emotions, development of competencies; on an *interactive level*- building new relationships, changing existing relationships including loss and new roles; and on a *contextual level*-integration of two environments or micro-systems, different curricula, and, sometimes, coping with additional family transitions' (Griebal and Niesel, 2003: 27)

School Refers to primary schools which provide care and compulsory education for children who are aged five years to twelve (approximately) over seven stages, P1-7.

Sector Refers to early learning and childcare and primary schools including those with a nursery class. (gtcs.org.uk)

Senior staff The staffing structures in nursery settings vary to include team leaders and senior early years practitioners (EYP) and nursery teachers (NT).

SSSC-Scottish Social Services Council Responsible for registering people who work in social services and regulating their education and training. (sssc.uk.com)

Stakeholder Any person who has an interest in the education and care of the child.

Abbreviations

ELC   Early Learning and Childcare

EYC   Early Years Centre

GCTS General Teaching Council for Scotland

HMIe Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

HMI   Her Majesty's Inspector

NT   Nursery Teacher

P1   Primary 1-the first stage in primary school in Scotland

SCQF Scottish Qualifications Framework

SEYP Senior Early Years Practitioner

TL   Team Leader

Research outputs

November 2018   Scottish Education Research Association (SERA) symposium-delivering paper *Contested and Unified spaces at the boundaries of the 'early level' Curriculum for Excellence*.

October 2018   Delivering closing remarks at Strathclyde University early years conference- *Inquisitive Minds, Realising the 'early level'-the meeting of minds and a change in pedagogical practice*.

August 2018 Keynote speaker at West Lothian Council-P1 teacher conference.

June 2018   Scottish Education Research Association (SERA) Early Years Network-*Transitions and Pedagogy*-presentation and discussion.

February 2018   Keynote speaker at Falkirk Council early years symposium for primary school headteachers and managers-*Play is the Way in Falkirk*.

February 2018   Guest lecture at Strathclyde University-presenting my research to BA 3 students.

December 2017   Submitted abstract for inclusion in a methods textbook to be published by Bloomsbury.

November 2017   Early Years Network twilight lecture-*Reconceptualising the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence.*

October 2017   Scottish Early Years Educational Research (SEYER) conference, Strathclyde University-invited speaker presenting my research and facilitating a workshop.

October and November 2017   *Pedagogies of Educational Transitions* (POET) -a Marie Curie Funded project which involved a programme of nursery visits arranged by Waikato University, New Zealand and as conference participant at the Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education conference at Lake Taupo, New Zealand.

February to March 2016   *Pedagogies of Educational Transitions* (POET)- a Marie Curie Funded project that involved delivering workshops and presentations at Charles Sturt University, Albury, NSW Australia.

Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Lorna Arnott for her tremendous support and encouragement over the last five years. She has expertly guided and reassured me on what has at times been a challenging journey. To Dr Daniela Sime my thanks for her sound advice and reminders to take my time and strive for clarity of message. The doctoral journey has had its ups and downs, and it would have been so easy to walk away and not complete my thesis, but it is not in my nature to give up!

I am indebted to Emeritus Professor Aline-Wendy Dunlop for her unswerving belief that I could by completing my doctoral study, add something new to the topic of transitions. I have valued her friendship and support since I started on my academic journey more than twenty years ago, during which she has guided and encouraged me and provided reassurance when I needed it. Without her cherished words of wisdom I doubt I would have got this far.

I want to acknowledge the contribution of the children, parents and staff from the two case study nurseries and three associated primary schools who in agreeing to participate in my study have helped me learn more about the complexities of achieving curriculum continuity across the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence.

Thanks to my many friends and family for their timely reminders that I should get a move on and complete what I started in 2013. I am grateful to my dear friend, and colleague, Sandra Kehoe HMI for her assistance in proofreading my final draft. Last but not least, a heartfelt and sincere thanks and enormous gratitude to my husband Leslie, for his enduring patience. To my eldest daughter, Laura and granddaughter Beth, and to my youngest daughter Alison, son-in-law Richard, and grandson Ben for their love and belief in me. To my wonderful mum, thank you for everything. You always said I could do this, and not ever forgetting my dad, who had he lived would be so proud of all I have achieved. To all of you, a heartfelt thank you.

I have learned so much more about transitions by watching and being with you all.

I started this journey, so I will finish.

Overview Of The Thesis

This study will explore children's curriculum transition across the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence Early Level, which aspires to provide a continuous learning experience for children aged 3 to 6 years. The 'early level' curriculum was always 'intended' to span the early learning and childcare sector and the first year of primary school (OECD, 2015). The study seeks to add new knowledge to the topic of curriculum continuity. I will argue that there are currently opportunities for collaboration between practitioners and teachers working at the 'early level' and a need for a deeper understanding of pedagogies of play, if the aspiration of a seamless early level curriculum experience for the child starting school in Scotland is to be realised.

Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the setting that the children in the study attend as a 'nursery'. In 2014, the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act* introduced the term Early Learning and Childcare' (ELC). The generic term was created to encompass both care and education and move away from the term 'pre-school' to the more inclusive term 'early learning and childcare'. However, when referring to the 'early learning and childcare' sector in policy terms, I will adopt the nationally agreed terminology. Throughout the thesis, I will use the term 'practitioner' to refer to the early learning and childcare sector workforce and the term 'teacher' when referring to the workforce in the primary school.

The **first chapter** of the thesis sets out the three research questions which underpin this study. The chapter outlines my personal and professional justification for this study, including why I have located it within a Scottish context. The problem that exists in Scotland with curriculum continuity is presented in the second section. Next, the key features of the early learning and childcare sector in Scotland are explained. The chapter concludes by setting out the rationale, aims and significance of the study in relation to the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level. **Chapter 2** begins by describing the process I employed to determine the scope of the literature review. The next two sections draw on international literature to explore the concept of 'curriculum' and 'transition'. The chapter continues by debating the themes of continuity and discontinuity as they relate to this study. Finally, I provide a brief historical outline of the Scottish Education system, including the genesis of Curriculum for Excellence, highlighting in particular, how the 'early level' was created to achieve curriculum continuity. **Chapter 3** presents a review of transitions literature under two emerging but related themes, *how children learn* and *play as pedagogy*. From this literature review, three research questions are proposed. In **Chapter 4** the theoretical framework which underpins the study is described. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development and aspects of Bourdieu's sociocultural theory are considered for their appropriateness, complementarity and limitations in relation to this study. In **Chapter 5** I describe the methodological aspects of this study. The qualitative research methods including my justification for using case study approaches are explained. The research approaches,

design, data collection techniques and strategies employed for data analysis for this exploratory research study are also described in detail. The findings are presented in Chapters 6 and 7. **Chapter 6** provides a synopsis of the different planning and pedagogical approaches used by practitioners and teachers which appear to influence the implementation of the 'early level' curriculum, while **Chapter 7** demonstrates that the transition across the 'early level' curriculum has an impact on how children learn, their ability to exercise agency and employ their social capital. Further, that over time, the focus and nature of parental support during the transition to school process alters as a result of their child starting school. **Chapter 8** begins by restating the research focus and then the six key research findings are described. Each finding is discussed in direct relationship to the research questions and the literature on transitions. In the final chapter, **Chapter 9,** some higher-level conclusions which emerged beyond the initial aim of this small-scale exploratory study are conceptualised. This chapter exposes some limitations of this small scale exploratory study. The chapter also outlines strategic and operational implications, and recommendations for those with responsibility for policy and practice. Areas for future research are proposed. Finally, the thesis restates the two main conclusions from this study, namely that children experience two 'early level' traditions and that in moving between these two traditions they move into and out again of 'contested' and 'unified' spaces which requires them to draw on their social capital.

Chapter 1: Introducing the study

Overview

This introductory chapter sets out my personal and professional justification for this small scale exploratory study which foregrounds ensuring and supporting the development and learning needs of the child starting school. It explores the problem of achieving curriculum continuity across the 'early level' and goes on to suggest the uniqueness and complexity of the early learning and childcare sector in Scotland may be a contributory factor in achieving curriculum continuity.

In order to explore the specific research problem the following three questions were posed:

Research question 1: *How do practitioners and teachers in two Scottish nursery settings and three associated primary schools ensure curriculum continuity and progression in children's learning across the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level?*

Research question 2: *What do parents do to support their children as they transition across the 'early level' curriculum from nursery to P1?*

Research question 3: *How is the continuity of children's learning, their agency and social capital affected by their transition across the 'early level' from nursery to P1?*

1.1 Personal and professional justification for this study

In 2005, I graduated with a Master of Education-Early Childhood Education degree. I had embarked on this journey some two years before, while working full time for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) now known as Education Scotland. At the time it was a challenge, in terms of finding time to do the day job as an inspector and find time to devote to my studies. After I graduated, I vowed I would never embark on any further academic study. This was not a difficult position to justify, as family commitments kept me busy enough. However, my interest in the topic of children's transition to primary school has not waned, if anything, it has strengthened from an interest to a passion.

A personal passion that developed following the arrival of my granddaughter, Beth in March, 2006. And then in May, 2015 the arrival of Beth's cousin, Ben, two months premature and facing multiple transitions. Transitions that included Ben being well enough to travel in a car seat, from the neo-natal unit in the hospital to his home. He is now a strong, inquisitive and very determined young child, transitioning well from home to nursery two days a week. Similarly, I had watched Beth experience a successful transition from home to nursery and then to primary school in 2011. She settled very well socially and emotionally, a motivated and happy girl with a voracious appetite for reading. Frustratingly, in curricular terms her learning was uninspiring, it lacked continuity and challenge, raising questions about whether Beth's experience was the same for all children. I believe there was insufficient

recognition of her skills, dispositions and personal characteristics, as a *social actor* with a wealth of knowledge and resources at her disposal.

In my professional remit as an inspector of both nurseries and primary schools, I became increasingly aware that for some children, the experience of transitioning from nursery to school in curriculum terms was also far from perfect. The 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence was intended to address identified continuity and progression issues (Scottish Executive, 2007; SEED, 2004), but it was not always providing continuity in children's learning. I began to reflect on the problem, what were the barriers and challenges facing practitioners and teachers as they planned and implemented the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence? And were there missed opportunities and possibilities for practitioners and teachers to enact the 'early level' as intended? The justification for this study was born, I decided to explore the problem by embarking on further study.

The recurring rhetoric over the last two decades, from politicians, education professionals and researchers, is that the earliest years of a child's life are critical (Abbott and Langston, 2005; Scottish Government, 2007a, 2008a; Deacon, 2011). In other words, if we do the right things early on, the child has a better chance of a positive outcome later in their life (Field, 2010) Linked very closely to this, is my belief that children's learning needs to be continuous, relevant, stimulating and enjoyable. The curriculum and learning experiences practitioners and teachers plan for children must value and help the child build on what they already confidently know and can do (Peters *et*

al., 2018). Furthermore, that practitioners and teachers need to embrace the emotional, social and cultural experiences every child brings with them, from home and from nursery to school (Peters, 2000; Dunlop, 2002). Practitioners and teachers have a responsibility to ensure that the 'early level' curriculum they plan and implement is fit for purpose.

Having worked now as an HM Inspector of schools for almost twenty years, I still observe children in P1 repeating tasks and activities they experienced in nursery. As one courageous P1 child, in a school I was inspecting was heard to exclaim '*Please Miss, I did that in nursery*'. Sadly, her declaration about experiencing sameness, fell on deaf ears that day. Revisiting and consolidating skills may be justifiable if there is also challenge and progression in learning.

Arguably, in Scotland, we have the potential to ensure curriculum continuity. The 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence was intentionally designed as a curriculum bridge across the two sectors of education, the 'early learning and childcare' sector and the 'primary school' sector (Scottish Executive, 2007; SEED, 2004). While there is an argument for going over familiar knowledge and skills, the P1 child I referred to above was bravely questioning the need to engage with subject content and skills that she believed she had already experienced and acquired. In this example, of curriculum discontinuity for this individual child, the teacher had taken scant cognisance of the child's prior knowledge, skills and attributes. The teacher did not appear to plan for

continuity, to build on the learning the child had brought with her to school (Peters *et al.*, 2018).

In 2005, my Master's thesis focussed on children's social and emotional transitions to school. While this study highlighted the importance of children's emotional resilience as a factor in realising a successful transition to school, at the time, I did not consider the implications of a disjointed curriculum on the child starting school. Now though, through my personal and professional experience, I recognised that the transition processes involving the developing child, the context(s) for learning and the practices of those involved in the child's transition to school were worthy of further exploration. In this study, I aim to explore the problem of achieving curriculum continuity and progression in learning across the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence.

1.2   Defining the curriculum continuity problem

The Scottish Government (2014) has a commitment to provide every child with high quality education which equips them with lifelong skills that will enable them to succeed now and in the future. The vision for Scotland is that 'all children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed*' (Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014*).

Until very recently, the legislation provided every 3 and 4 year old with an entitlement to 600 hours of free early learning and childcare. By the year, 2020 the entitlement will increase to 1140 hours of free early learning and childcare for every 3 and 4 year old and some 2 year olds whose parents are

in receipt of certain benefits (Scottish Government, 2015, 2016, 2017a). The commitment to provide children and their families with access to high quality, affordable and easily accessible early learning and childcare clearly has implications for children as they transition not just from home but into and across a range of nursery settings. However, Scottish Government's legislation and policy which rightly places a strong emphasis on achieving curriculum continuity and progression throughout the learner's journey (Scottish Government, 2016), needs to go beyond the rhetoric of policy, to reality in practice.

The Scottish Education system is based around the implementation of national curriculum guidance '*Curriculum for Excellence 3-18*' (Scottish Executive, 2007; SEED, 2004) (see also Chapter 2). This ambitious, socially constructed curriculum has been part of a Scottish Government manifesto objective since 2006. The 'early level' of *Curriculum for Excellence* is designed to provide a broad range of learning experiences for children aged 3 to 6 years of age (Scottish Government, 2008b; Scottish Executive, 2007; SEED, 2004). It is intended to span both the early learning and childcare sector and the early stages of primary school. Practitioners and teachers are expected to plan and deliver learning across eight curriculum areas designed to equip children with a broad range of skills and capacities. Each curriculum area is further described through a set of clearly defined 'learning experiences' and 'outcomes' (Scottish Government, 2008b; Scottish Executive, 2007; SEED, 2004). Curriculum for Excellence guidance expects

most children to achieve the 'early level' outcomes by the end of their first year in compulsory education, P1.

The structure and range of early education provision in the Scottish early learning and childcare sector differs from many other European and International school systems. Some of these uniquely Scottish features are described later in section 1.3. The diverse range of early education provision presents practitioners, teachers, parents and children with particular challenges, notwithstanding the focus of this study, of achieving curriculum continuity across the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence. National and international studies already recognise that making the physical, social and emotional transition from nursery settings to primary school can be difficult for some children (Einarsdottir, 2003; Broström, 2002a; Loizou, 2011; McNair, 2016).

> Transitions can be assumed to bring discontinuity Griebel and Neisel (2003) Dunlop and Fabian (2007) and may therefore cause social and emotional turmoil as well as discontinuities in learning. Ensuring that each transition is successful is significant for children's emotional well-being and to their continuing cognitive achievements.
> (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007: 2)

According to some researchers, periods of *discontinuity* are expected, and some researchers argue that this is not such a bad thing (Broström, 2002a; 2016). This study while cognisant of this thinking, aims to highlight the

impact of curriculum discontinuity on children's ability to exercise agency and their entitlement to a continuous learning experience.

The Scottish Government is committed, through legislation and a set of national objectives, to the delivery of high quality early learning and childcare (Scottish Government, 2013). This national vision also expects every child to benefit from a continuous, responsive, flexible curriculum that is designed in such a way that it motivates and challenges all learners (Scottish Government, 2013). Staff in education establishments in all sectors also have a responsibility to improve children's health and wellbeing outcomes. The government expects nurseries and schools to implement Curriculum for Excellence, with a specific focus on delivering the 'entitlement' children have to a broad, balanced, coherent, purposeful, progressive and well-planned curriculum (Scottish Government, 2008b). In addition, Education Scotland, which has an external scrutiny role for ensuring the quality of education, expects practitioners and teachers to take account of what makes for effective transitions into, during and beyond any stage of children's learning including where appropriate, shared placements (Education Scotland, 2013). The complex nature of the early education provision in Scotland may be a contributory element which currently impedes every child's entitlement to a continuous curriculum across the 'early level'.

1.3 Features of the Early Learning and Childcare sector in Scotland

In Scotland, parents are able to choose the nursery setting in which their child receives their 600 hours of free early learning and childcare, although

most families depend on local provision. Parents can choose to access an education authority nursery setting or select one of the many private and voluntary sector nursery settings, provided these have entered into a partnership agreement with a Scottish education authority. The early learning and childcare sector includes playgroups that are located in the voluntary or third sector, nurseries in the private and independent sector, and a range of education authority provision. Education authority provision can include a nursery class attached to a primary school, or a nursery school which provides care and education for 37 weeks across the year, or extended day/family centres which offer all year round provision for babies from birth to children of school age. Regardless of the type of provision, children attending nursery will have access to a General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) registered teacher, as promised in a 2007 Scottish Government manifesto. Since the introduction of this policy initiative, defining 'access' to a teacher has been interpreted variously by education authorities, resulting in a range of models of practice across the country.

Another feature, specific to the Scottish context, is the pre-service training for practitioners. A range of different qualification routes exist as part of pre-service and in-service training. These qualification routes and training courses and programmes are provided by external agencies to include Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and colleges. Some practitioners gain their qualification through accredited in-house training agreements which are recognised by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). In Scotland, all early learning and childcare practitioners are required to be registered with

the SSSC, this is a legislative requirement regardless of the type of setting they work in or position they hold.

Children may spend up to two and a half years in a nursery setting before they make the move to primary school. This transition is acknowledged as bringing a new set of social, emotional and cognitive challenges for some children (Dunlop, 2002; Ackesjö, 2014). In primary school, the teachers' expectations, styles of interacting and routines are often very different compared to the rhythm, norms, routines and learning environments children experience at nursery. These environmental and cultural changes can be quite daunting and unsettling for some children (Einarsdottir, 2003; Ackesjö, 2014; Dunlop, 2016). Furthermore, it is possible that the intended expansion of the early learning and childcare sector will create additional transition issues for children.

1.4   The aims, rationale and significance of this study

The primary aim of this study is to explore whether practitioners and teachers face barriers and challenges in achieving curriculum continuity across the 'early level' for children starting school. A plethora of national and international studies has debated in the last three decades the issue of children's transition from nursery to primary school. Many of these studies identify the aspects which contribute to an effective transition and some of the emotional and social implications for children starting school (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007; Dunlop, 2018; Hayes, 2003; O'Kane, 2009; McNair, 2016). While these authors acknowledge that over time most children show no

adverse signs as a result of the move to school, it is clear that for some children the loss of friendship groups and unfamiliarity with the rules and routines of school can create feelings of anxiety.

Many transition studies have provided an extensive narrative on the social, cultural, structural and pedagogical differences which exist between the early learning and childcare sector and primary school sector. Fabian and Dunlop describe transition as 'changes of relationship, teaching style, environment, space, time, contexts for learning, and learning itself, combine during transition, making intense demands on children and families' (2007: 5). These differences contribute to the challenges facing practitioners and teachers in ensuring children experience a 'smooth transition' (Neuman, 2000: 8). They also open up possibilities for practitioners and teachers to share practice, thereby creating opportunities to work together across the sectors.

While significant research has been undertaken in relation to pastoral transitions, there is clearly still a need to add new knowledge to the topic of curriculum continuity for children starting school. And so, in this transitions study, I aim to explore the factors that contribute to, or indeed impede curriculum continuity and progression in children's learning as they transition from nursery to school. It has been argued that the impact of a disjointed curriculum and poorly planned progression in learning for the very youngest children is adversely affecting their future progress, and in particular for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds, (O'Kane, 2009; Field, 2010).

Burrell and Bubb suggest 'initial success at school, both socially and intellectually, leads to a virtuous cycle of achievement and is a critical factor in determining children's adjustment to the demands of the school environment and future progress' (Burrell and Bubb, 2000: 58, see also (Ghaye and Pascal, 1989; Leseman and Slot, 2014). Previous studies have shown that school children regularly repeat the tasks and activities they experienced in their nursery setting (Fabian and Dunlop, 2007; Broström, 2016). National and international transition studies demonstrate that achieving a successful transition to school has been a concern and remains a challenge for practitioners and teachers (Einarsdottir, 2003, 2005; Perry and Dockett, 2008; Stephen, *et al.*, 2010; Ackesjö, 2013).

Education Scotland (2013) identified transition to school as an area for improvement and advised each of the thirty two Scottish Education Authorities to address this as part of their planned implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. In 2013, national guidance made it clear that practitioners in the early learning and childcare sector and teachers in primary schools needed to identify what constituted effective transitions and use this information to improve curriculum continuity and progression for children moving from nursery to primary school (Education Scotland, 2013). It is clear from the findings of the wide range of research studies on this topic, transitions have generally improved, particularly with regard to children's emotional wellbeing (Dunlop, 2003; Kienig, 2003; Margetts, 2003; O'Kane, 2009). However, as I have discovered in my reading of the transitions literature, including studies which are focussed on the continuity,

discontinuity debate, (Broström, 2002a; Dunlop, 2002; Dockett and Perry, 2007, 2014; Dunlop and Fabian, 2007; Margetts, 2000, 2002), relatively few current studies focus exclusively on achieving continuity of curricular experience and progression in children's learning. I could locate only one that uniquely explored the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level.

The significance of this specific research problem is rooted in the Scottish Government's commitment to improve the educational experience for all children through a relentless focus on improving excellence and equity in the education system in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2015). It is argued that, to achieve this commitment, part of the solution will be to improve 'early level' curriculum transitions for learners, and that responsibility lies with practitioners and teachers. Education professionals at all levels, have been responding in various ways to the expectation that in implementing Curriculum for Excellence, practitioners need 'to take account of what makes for effective transitions into, during and beyond any stage of children's learning including where appropriate, shared placements' (Education Scotland, 2013: 6). In responding to the call to improve curriculum continuity many education authorities have placed a renewed focus on improving the transitions to school policies and arrangements which nurseries and schools develop. By highlighting the importance of curriculum continuity in this way raises questions not just about policy but transitions practices and curriculum content.

1.5   Chapter summary

This introductory chapter has shown that there is a need to explore how the complex features of the early learning and childcare sector and the structures within P1 in Scottish schools contribute to the challenges of planning and delivering the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence. I have acknowledged the extensive literature on the subject of transition to school. This small scale exploratory study aspires to add new knowledge to an under researched aspect of transitions and to extend our understanding of how to achieve curriculum continuity across the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence. The next chapter will present the literature that was explored in relation to the research problem. It will define some key themes and concepts. The chapter continues by presenting a brief historical outline of the Scottish Education system and describes the genesis of Curriculum for Excellence.

Chapter 2: The Scottish Education System and Curriculum for Excellence

Introduction to the literature review and chapter overview

The volume of scholarly works on the subject of transition to school is vast, covering many related themes and theoretical perspectives which are beyond the scope of this thesis, I therefore placed specific limitations upon my exploration of the extensive transitions literature. Furthermore, to ensure that the literature search was relevant and manageable I conducted searches using the Strathclyde University library's Suprimo search engine. I limited my searches to a set of keywords; transition, play and pedagogy, early childhood and early years curriculum. I excluded material that related to transitions research in middle and upper primary and secondary schools. I included literature on early childhood theory, and on Scottish policy and guidance because of the specific focus of the research on children's curriculum transition from nursery to school. I also searched in national and international early childhood journals for empirical studies less than twenty years old which were related to the research problem. This chapter explores in sections one and two, the concepts of *transition* and *curriculum*, as they relate to this study. Section three considers the themes of *continuity* and *discontinuity*. In debating the themes of *continuity* and *discontinuity* in children's learning, I will demonstrate that children experience both as they make the transition to school. The fourth section of this chapter draws on contemporary and seminal literature, including policy documents to provide a brief historical outline of the various aspects of the Scottish Education

system. I will draw attention to the uniquely Scottish context of this thesis and how the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence 'early level' was intentionally created to provide children with curriculum continuity. This chapter concludes by suggesting that greater collaboration between practitioners and teachers is needed, if curriculum continuity is to be achieved.

The next chapter focuses on literature related to two key themes : *how young children learn* and *play as pedagogy,* themes which are pertinent to the specific research problem; achieving curriculum continuity across the Curriculum for Excellence 'early level'.

2.1   Defining the term 'transition'

Jindal-Snape (2016) proposes the term *transition* is conceptualised in different ways by researchers. Some researchers highlight *transition* as a process where children move between different classes and *transfer* as a move between different schools, thereby creating a distinction between a *process* and an *event* (O'Farrelly and Hennessy, 2013*).* Other researchers have developed their concept of *transition* by drawing on for example, border theory (Wenger, 1998), rites of passage theory (Bridges, 2013; van Genep, 1960, 1977), sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 2003) and ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory describes transition as the adjustment to new contexts outside the family as an ecological transition, whereby the child experiences changes in their position, relations and identity. Children in this study not only transition between two culturally

different sectors of education, but they also navigate changes in curriculum design, pedagogy and identity through the inevitable changes to their routines and exposure to a new set of rules (Pianta *et al.*, 1999). Hayes' study (2003) found that children starting school are expected to adjust socially, emotionally and cognitively to a new environment. Other studies have found that friendships are lost or weakened and new ones are created and the skills and knowledge children bring with them to school are too often undervalued, not recognised or even ignored (Fabian, 2002; Rogoff, 2003; Peters, 2010; Jindal-Snape and Miller, 2010; Ackesjö, 2014). Ackesjö contends that 'children both shape the transition and are shaped by the transition' (2014: 6). The transition process is of necessity a sociocultural process, where children learn to 'reconstruct themselves', their identity as a member of a new community (ibid, 2014: 7). Transitions studies suggest children in transition may encounter continuity with regard to familial structures and cultures and discontinuity in terms of their agency, identity and curriculum experiences (Broström, 2002b; O'Kane and Hayes, 2013; Lago, 2014; Perry *et al.*, 2014). Such a position is not always to be viewed as a barrier or a threat as posited by Griebel and Niesal, (2003) and Ackesjö (2014). I contend therefore, having undertaken the research that transition is not a static process, rather it could be viewed as a process that over time offers children new and exciting challenges. In defining transition, I suggest that it should be responsive, fluid and flexible. It should value children's agency, build on the knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions children accrue over their life course. It should promote children's uniqueness and

intend to ease their passage through periods of emotional, social and curriculum discontinuity.

2.2   Defining the term 'curriculum'

Saracho and Spodek (2002: vii) claim that 'there is no one single definition of curriculum that everyone can agree upon'.   In Scotland, professionals working with the very youngest children have largely favoured a curriculum that places the child firmly at the centre of curriculum activities and learning experiences (Stephen 2006: 3).   There are historical roots in this approach, with both Hadow (1931) and Plowden (1967) espousing a child-centred early childhood curriculum. Similarly, some of the innovative ideas proposed by for example, Froebel have encouraged practitioners and teachers to reflect on their practice, to challenge the overly formal teaching approaches that have in the past and, I would posit, are still promoted by initial teacher education training providers in Scotland. My interpretation garners support from Hadow (1931) who, ahead of his time, notes 'the curriculum of the primary school is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience, rather than knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored' (1931: 139).   Further, Hadow suggests the curriculum on offer needs to reflect more modern ways of working.

Blenkin and Kelly (1996) argue that a curriculum needs to encompass and sustain a child's growth in self-knowledge and provide ways of developing autonomy in learning.   The State of New Jersey education department suggests that the curriculum is the entire range of experiences that children have at school.   Further, they emphasise the need for professionals to take

account of their knowledge of child development and make careful observations of the needs and interests of individual children when planning the school curriculum (New Jersey Department of Education, 2010). Biber describes the curriculum as 'an anthology of learning experiences, conceived and arranged based on a program's educational goals and the community's social forces' (1984: 303). Each curriculum manifests itself as an image of what children 'ought to be and become' grounded on the awareness of social values and a system that interprets those values into experiences for learners' (Biber, 1984: 303).

In Scotland, practitioners during their early career training in nursery settings and in other institutions, including the college sector, focus more on the interests and motivations of the child as the starting point for curriculum design, planning and implementation (Fisher, 2013). I suggest that these differences in early career training results in practitioners adopting vastly different pedagogical philosophies which sets them apart from their teacher colleagues in the early stages of primary schools. These variations expose differences in how the curriculum is designed, planned and implemented (Moss, 2013). It is therefore not impossible to imagine a range of differing pedagogical approaches existing within each context or microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Experiential learning has been described by Dewey (1938, 1974) as the process that links education, work and personal development. Adopting a skills based approach may well align with the 'entitlements' outlined within

the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence guidance (Scottish Government, 2008b). Kolb (1984) similarly describes experiential learning as being a holistic approach to learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour. Kolb's theory therefore has coherence with the Scottish curriculum guidance which advocates creating a skill and attributes based curriculum which develops the whole child within a broad general education (Kolb, 1984; Morris, 1991; SEED, 2004; Scottish Government, 2008b). How children learn has been explored by many, but the contribution made by theorists such as Piaget (1972) has some relevance today. It could be argued his theory of development has impacted on past and current curriculum design in Scotland. Similarly, the current model, Curriculum for Excellence with its social, emotional and cognitive developmental focus through and across 'levels' which children are expected to progress, as they interact with their ecological and cultural environment, reflect elements of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Bourdieu's (1983) sociocultural theory.

Stephen, makes a compelling case that the ways in which children, childhood and learning are thought about should influence the kind of provision that a society makes for its youngest members (2006: 5). The emergence or the re-emergence, as some might argue, of a child-initiated curriculum and what this means for practitioners and teachers in Scotland has prompted some to consider a shift in their pedagogical practice and teaching approaches. The increased use of developmentally appropriate play-based pedagogy, including experiential and active learning approaches are beginning to form

part of children's early curriculum experiences in P1 classrooms (Grogan and Duncan, 2017).   However, the extent or overall effectiveness of these pedagogical changes on realising the aspiration for curriculum continuity across the 'early level' are inconsistent. In their study, Stephen *et al.* refer to the Scottish Executive's terminology for active learning as 'learning which engages and challenges children's thinking using real-life and imaginary situations' (2010: 317).   Interestingly, their study highlighted that teachers showed a lack of confidence in talking about their pedagogical approaches and what difference these made to children's learning, which may account for some of the institutional differences between the ELC sector and primary school sector.

Evidence from inspection reports published by Education Scotland suggests these active learning approaches are not yet good enough in the early stages of all primary schools. Such a position compromises the child's entitlement to experience a continuous curriculum journey from the early learning and childcare sector into primary 1 (HMIe 2009; Stephen, *et al.*, 2010; Education Scotland, 2013). The fact that the curriculum offer should according to contemporary and seminal studies, focus on the needs of the individual child, adds weight to the justification for this study which intends to explore continuity across the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence.   An early years curriculum is therefore one that is centred on and provides for the immediate needs of the child, reflecting the child's habitus, their specific lived environment. Further, at the point of delivery it should take account of how young children learn best, through play.

2.3 Debating continuity and discontinuity: Navigating the changes in environment, rules, culture, pedagogy and curriculum

Bronfenbrenner's earlier ecological model of human development (1979) is often used to conceptualise children's journey as they move from home to nursery and to school. Each of these life changing events are located within the inter-locking set of structures or nests which Bronfenbrenner calls, the microsystem, the child's home, the nursery or school the child attends and the macrosystem, the wider community or society in which the child functions (Chapter 3). Bronfenbrenner's systems theory suggests that strong mesosystem links help the child get the most from 'crossing borders' (Campbell Clark, 2000: 15). In conceptualising the shift from nursery to primary school as an ecological transition, the pressure on the child to succeed becomes harder. Bernstein (1970) asserts that 'in order to succeed in the education system children need to be told the rules of the system; for example, the curriculum, the pedagogy and the ways of evaluating' (Bernstein, 1970: 344).

The formal structures of the school day may prevent the child from challenging the rules, particularly if the child has difficulty adjusting to the culture, relationships and pedagogy in their new world, (Dunlop, 2016). In a review of transitions literature, Peters (2010) highlights some of the characteristics which play a part in how well children transition to school. These include: the nature of the context the child enters, its compatibility with the characteristics of the developing person, for example, adjusting to the sharp contrast which can exist between a child-centred environment and one

that exudes adult direction. In the former, more flexible daily routines, activities and resources sit comfortably alongside reflexive pedagogy. In the latter, adult-directed environment where learning is 'packed with compulsory tasks' may present challenges for the child (Carr *et al.*, 2009: 220). Similarly in her study of children moving into Year 1 from the Foundation Stage, Fisher (2009) notes that a shift towards whole class lessons and listening to teachers' instructions offers less time for play-based activities.

Transition to P1 induction programmes are often well established with the intention of helping the child adjust emotionally and socially, sometimes referred to as a *pastoral transition* (Education Scotland, 2017). What makes for an effective curriculum transition is not so well documented in policy or indeed planned as part of transition to school induction programmes. As a result, periods of disjointed learning are often experienced by some children in the first year of primary school (Broström, 2002a; Griebel and Niesel, 2003, 2009; Blaisdell, 2016). By contrast, Stephen's review of international literature of the educational experiences offered to young children supports the view that some children in transition may well benefit from periods of continuity.

> A period of pedagogical continuity offers the prospect of smoothing
> transition by introducing new curriculum content in ways that are both
> familiar and developmentally appropriate. Such an approach is likely
> to be particularly helpful for young learners who are just beginning to
> be able to think about their own learning and for whom the responsive

pedagogy typical of early years settings would offer sensitive support for the new challenges of primary education. (Stephen, 2006: 29)

The culture of the home, the child's nursery setting and the school also need to be considered, understood, respected and valued (McNair, 2016). Similarly, the relationships the child has forged with significant caregivers and others are important at times of transition (Wickett, 2016). The extent to which relationships between cultures are compatible can combine to make curriculum bridging problematic (Moss, 2013). Stephen (2006, 2010) also highlights the differences in culture, in relationships within and between the sectors and differences in pedagogy. Each of these differences are real, they exist and need to be challenged. Bernstein's view is 'if the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher' (1970: 345). A number of research studies emphasise the importance of making strong connections between the differing cultures and traditions on either side of the transition border (Dahlberg and Taguchi, 1994; Neuman, 2000; Broström, 2016). Likewise, Fabian and Dunlop (2007) underline 'the importance of making positive connections across differing cultures' (2007: 6).

Literature on the transition process strongly emphasise the point that early childhood [*curriculum*] programmes are most effective if they are part of a broader coherent framework linking early child development initiatives to the child's home and to primary schooling (Lombardi 1992; Morris, 1991). This in agreement with Fabian and Dunlop, who note:

curriculum frameworks that bridge pre-school and primary education strengthen pedagogical continuity, thereby helping to maintain enthusiasm for learning and school attendance. Indeed, some countries are moving toward integrated initial training across the sectors, so that professionals working in all phases of the education system share a common theoretical base and understanding. Training about transitions, particularly for those teaching the first class in primary school, might help to highlight and resolve the issues, helping to make a positive start to school for all children (2007: 6).

As many writers on the subject of transition identify, the experience of transitioning to formal school can be a positive experience. Broström (2002a) claims 'most children have predominantly positive experiences when they enter school. They meet new academic and social challenges. These challenges mobilise the potentials, the skills, and talents the children bring with them to school' (ibid, 2002a: 53). However, this is not true for all children. The longitudinal studies by the *Growing up in Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2007a) team and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014) report that as well as variations in the consistency and quality of their learning experiences at home 'there is clear evidence of a persistent attainment gap between pupils from the richest and poorest households in Scotland. This gap starts in pre-school and continues throughout primary and secondary school' (JRF, 2014: 26).

Margetts asserts that 'children bring more to school than their backpacks' (2003: 5), suggesting that children starting school who are most at risk of adjustment difficulties should be very well supported in the early weeks of schooling in ways that are responsive to the diversity of children's backgrounds, needs and abilities' (ibid, 2003:13). Fabian (2003) found that many children do possess the skills and resilience they need to adapt to formal schooling, in line with Dunlop (2003) who suggests some children have the emotional and social capital to learn and achieve. Perry and Dockett highlight that the learning journey is not seamless for all and that part of the solution in easing children's transitions is that 'children need to be part of shaping the next steps in their learning journey' (2008: 47), such as designing the curriculum, helping to plan the *what* and *how* they learn.

Perhaps then it is what happens in the playroom or classroom that makes the difference to the quality of a child's learning experience and how this improves their outcomes for the future. Brooker (2008) is of the view that high quality leadership for learning at all levels makes the difference to the outcomes of learners of all ages, reinforcing the message that providing effective learning experiences needs to be more than just rhetoric in policy papers.

The *Building the Curriculum* guidance documents suggest the best practice in early education will provide young children with differentiated play activities and appropriate levels of cognitive challenge (Scottish Government, 2008b). It will exist when well-informed professionals plan learning with a focus on the

child, building on their previous learning experiences (Scottish Government, 2008b; Scottish Executive, 2007).   Evidence from Education Scotland inspection reports suggest an improving picture in terms of achieving curriculum continuity.   Similarly, the *Improving Scottish Education* report notes that consistently good progress is being made by children across key aspects of their learning' (HMIe, 2009). And yet, ten years on from this claim about making progress with the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, that implementation is not complete, if anything the fulfilment of the 'early level' is still according to Dunlop a 'gift' not yet fully unwrapped (2018: 227).

There have been improvements to the child's starting school experience, for example, providing them with more opportunities for play, a focus on child-centred pedagogy, the use of responsive planning which includes the child's voice in determining the curriculum focus and nature of learning activities. However, significant cultural differences between the early learning and childcare sector and primary schools remain (Fisher, 2013).   The improvements in culture and environment alluded to above are welcomed, but they have not yet taken hold everywhere and children are too often expected to fit into the school routines, to the rules and the ways of learning that are sometimes at odds with their previous experience (McNair, 2016). Stephen (2010) sums it up neatly, when she suggests that changing pedagogy involves not only changing practice, but also thinking differently about the process of learning and the role of the learner and the teacher.

2.4   The specific Scottish context: A brief historical outline

The uniqueness of the Scottish education system has been much debated, but never more so than in the last twenty years. Campbell (2000) considers the distinctiveness of Scottish education, arguing that a belief in the value of education is fundamental to Scottish culture. Furthermore, she warrants that the breadth of the curriculum, its accessibility to the whole community, is what sets the Scottish education system apart from others. This view is interesting in that it supports the rationale and philosophy on which Curriculum for Excellence was premised (SEED, 2003, 2004). The idea that a system of education must help those growing up in a culture find an identity within that culture resonates with some of Bruner's (1996) work. Arguably, a strength of Curriculum for Excellence is that it promotes both culture and identity within each community of learners' culture or context. Critics of Curriculum for Excellence are quick to point out that its rationale is flawed and that it does little to protect Scotland's historical track record of having a strong education system (Paterson, 2012, 2018). An alternative curriculum model has yet to be offered that would provide the breadth, flexibility and continuity of experience that in particular, the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence is intended to provide. Furthermore, the strength of Curriculum for Excellence lies in its suitability for achieving curriculum continuity and that the rationale encourages and empowers stakeholders to customise the curriculum to reflect the unique culture and identity of each setting or school.

Raffe says that 'reforms should preserve and build on the system's strengths' (2008: 24) and I would add, uniqueness. Reeves asserts 'that the key to curricular reform lies with increasing the capacity of teacher and student learning in schools and that requires a major revision of our approach to accountability' (2008: 6).

The government's focus on improving the quality of early learning and childcare provision was in response to the messages in the OECD's Starting Strong reports in 2015 and in 2017 (OECD, 2015, 2017). In particular, the 2015 report stressed that any review of Curriculum for Excellence offered schools, teachers, as agents of change an opportunity to think about improving quality, to design a curriculum to be proud of, that exudes quality of provision, and takes full cognisance of every school's unique culture and environment (OECD, 2015). If designed in accordance with these principles, then the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence has the potential to create opportunities and possibilities for innovation and collaboration across the early learning and childcare sector and the early stages in primary schools.

The *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000*, placed a duty on all thirty two of the education authorities in Scotland to provide an education which would develop the whole child within a supportive culture (Scottish Government, 2000). The duty is described thus as focussing on ensuring 'that the education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential' (Scottish Government, 2000: 67).

The argument then for a child-centred curriculum has certainly been strengthened through legislation, though the extent of the implementation and positive impact of the current framework Curriculum for Excellence on children's learning is in question (Stephen, 2006; OECD, 2015; Priestley, 2018). Additionally, longitudinal studies, such as the *Growing up in Scotland* (GUS) study, have highlighted that action to address educational inequality and significant deprivation and poverty related underachievement is urgently required and these calls have been followed by a relentless focus on improving outcomes for all children (Scottish Government, 2007a, 2013a). Initiatives to tackle the effects of poverty on children's lives and to improve academic outcomes for children, include the *Early Years Collaborative* (Scottish Government, 2007b) and the *Scottish Attainment Challenge* (Scottish Government, 2015). These nationally funded initiatives were largely welcomed across the education system as a vehicle for tackling deeply entrenched social deprivation and underachievement issues. This study does not intend to specifically explore the impact of poverty on children's curriculum transitions, however, it is worth considering that some children start school with significant socio-economic challenges, reinforcing the fact that life is not a level playing field for many children and families.

I can recall as a primary school headteacher in the late 1990s every school had to create individual school improvement plans which were scrutinised by senior officers to ensure compliance with the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000*, which placed a duty on schools to improve the quality of the curriculum, learning and teaching (Scottish Government, 2000).

Raising attainment was not the only driver in those days, a child-centered curriculum was recognised as equally important. It was a number of years later that I experienced a culture shift, where measuring children's academic performance started to and continues to dominate teachers' practice. On a positive note, the importance of placing the child at the heart of our activities came with the arrival of *How Good is Our School* and *The Child at the Centre,* quality improvement documents, (HMIe, 2002; SOEID, 1996, 2001a). These national guidance documents promoted a culture which espoused the importance of leadership for self-improvement and the need to quantify the impact of effective leadership and high quality experiences on children's learning.

In 2002, the principles of the Scottish curriculum were debated nationally and by January 2003 the Scottish Executive published its response to the National Debate on Education, *Educating for Excellence Choice and Opportunity* (SEED, 2003). In this response document, the government outlined its commitment to a framework for improvement 'we are committed to making the outcomes of education in Scotland one of the best possible for each and every child. We must work together to meet young people's aspirations, to close the opportunity gap and realise the potential of every child in Scotland*'* (SEED, 2003: 5). As a result, the government set each council a challenging agenda. One particular challenge was to develop a seamless, continuous curriculum from age 3 to 18 set within a single set of principles. The seeds were sown for the genesis of Curriculum for Excellence.

Terms such as 'quality indicators', 'impact', 'quality of experience' and 'outcomes' began to emerge and are now commonly used by education professionals. A plethora of documents throughout the 1990s and in the first decade of the 21st century brought the quality improvement agenda firmly into focus. Documents include, the *Standards and Quality in Education Pre-school Education 1997-2001* (HMIE, 2001), the *Regulation of Early Education and Childcare: The Way Ahead* (SEED, 2000), and, *A Curriculum for Excellence: The Curriculum Review Group* (SEED, 2004). Parallel to the debate about the curriculum review, was the focus on improving the life chances of the most vulnerable children and families. Policies from other government departments and longitudinal studies such as the *Growing Up in Scotland Research Study* (Scottish Government, 2007a) and *Closing the Gap* emerged (Scottish Government, 2007b). These studies demonstrated that the earliest years of a child's life are critical to ensuring their future success and positive outcomes.

By the end of 2004, the *Curriculum Framework for Children aged 3 to 5* (SCCC, 1999) and the *5-14 Curriculum* (SCCC, 1991) guidelines were considered outdated and Boyd (2006) explored the concept of 'curriculum architecture' in a literature review commissioned by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED, 2006). Resolving the problem of continuity and progression in children's learning still evaded practitioners and teachers and policy makers. The outcomes of Boyd's (2006) literature review provided a mandate for those with responsibility at authority level to promote innovation and flexibility in planning and designing a refreshed curriculum for

the 21st century. The promise of greater flexibility in designing a curriculum which reflected the individual context of the school or centre was judged by some with scepticism in the early years and primary sector and academics (McGonigal *et al.*, 2007; Paterson, 2018). The Scottish Executive Education Department's OECD commissioned report recommended that 'each local authority develop an explicit policy framework which contains a charter of learning opportunities…a commitment to provide a range of education…which best suits the circumstances and needs of its communities' (SEED, 2007: 23).

A period of curriculum review followed from 2006 to 2012, whereby professionals in schools across Scotland focused on redesigning their curriculum structures in line with Curriculum for Excellence guidance. Curriculum for Excellence is formed of five 'levels' beginning in the two years the child spends in the early learning and childcare sector, next their seven years in primary school and then the first three years of their time in secondary school. The 'Senior Phase' of secondary school encompasses the 'fourth level'. Each level (Table 1) contains a series of experiences and outcomes for each of the eight curriculum areas. In redesigning their curriculum structures, teachers and practitioners spent significant blocks of time 'unpacking and repacking' the 'experiences and outcomes' to create curriculum programmes of study for the eight curriculum subjects often starting with literacy and numeracy programmes (Scottish Government, 2008b). On the back of these time-consuming activities, practitioners and teachers built their 'unique' curriculum which, advice suggested, should

reflect the specific context of the setting or school. They devised bureaucratic planning and assessment systems which made endless references to the specific learning outcomes children were expected to achieve in each of the four levels, taking their attention away from the focus of their work, teaching children (Paterson, 2018).

Level	Stage
Early	The pre-school years and P1 (age 3-5 years)
First	To the end of P4 (age 6-8 years, but earlier or later for some)
Second	To the end of P5-7 (age 9-11 years, but earlier or later for some)
Third	Secondary school S1 to S3 (age 12-14 years, but earlier for some)

Table 1-The levels and stages for the Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes

Paterson (2018), determined that these time consuming curriculum architecture activities involving vast numbers of teachers, had varying degrees of success in bringing about improvement to the quality of the curriculum or, he argues positive outcomes for children and young people. Education Scotland notes that 'evidence on the current performance of Scotland's education system suggests that we have a good education system, which is performing very strongly in a number of respects' (Education Scotland, 2013: 5). However, longstanding issues such as underachievement, poorly planned curriculum experiences and social and educational inequality continue to exist and from the rhetoric in government reports, it is clear that more remains to be done to improve the 'early level' curriculum in many of Scotland's nurseries and P1 classrooms. In particular, there is a need for continued focus on tackling underperformance in attainment and achieving greater consistency in the quality of curriculum,

learning and teaching (Education Scotland, 2013). One important element and a key focus of this study, is identifying why some children experience discontinuity in their learning in P1 given that the 'early level' was specifically designed to tackle just such an issue. (Margetts, 2002; Perry *et al.*, 2014; Peters, 2015). The challenge then for practitioners and teachers will be to balance up the Curriculum for Excellence rhetoric with practice to ensure continuity of experience and progression in learning for children aged three to six. The 'early level' with its set of developmentally appropriate experiences and outcomes across eight curriculum subjects, spanning the ELC sector and early primary stages is therefore, by design, ideally suited to meeting this challenge,

2.5   The research problem

I have argued that the planning and implementation of the 'early level' curriculum is not yet continuous or based on shared pedagogical understandings between practitioners and teachers. The aspiration to improve the child's curriculum transition to school has a way to go and is rightly the central focus of this study. Hurst and Joseph (2008) describe a set of principles of a developmentally appropriate curriculum. The underlying message the principles promote is that the child needs to 'be helped to move from one kind of provision [curriculum] to another …this affects not only early childhood, but matters throughout life' (Hurst and Joseph, 2008: ix).

In concluding the debate on curriculum continuity, though a more fitting description of the current 'early level' position might be 'discontinuity', I point

to Peters' study of pre-school children, which found that 'although aspects of discontinuity provided challenge for children on entry to school, in general they adapted quickly to the new environment and the demands of the new curriculum, and showed pride in their achievements' (2000: 25). Arguably then a lack of continuity in some aspects is not completely detrimental to the child's experience. In a purely Scottish context, this raises questions about achieving curriculum continuity, which I suggest is further complicated by the complex landscape and range of provision within the early learning and childcare sector in Scotland. Similarly, the design of the curriculum itself is different in so many ways to other curricula across the world. By its very nature, the structures within and across the distinctively Scottish system will continue to present practitioners, teachers and policy makers with a number of curriculum continuity challenges, but they also offer possibilities and opportunities.

2.6   Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have identified that the 'early level' which was created specifically to facilitate the planning and implementation of a curriculum that provided continuity and progression in learning for children aged 3 to 6 presents some philosophical challenges for practitioners and teachers. Further, that practitioners in Scotland's early learning and childcare sector and teachers in the early stages of primary schools need to consider the differences in their culturally created pedagogical practices if they are to 'bridge the curriculum gap' and build on children's previous learning experiences. The aim of a shared vision of the 'early level' curriculum

through stronger partnerships, mutual collaboration and changes in pedagogy would make a positive impact on achieving curriculum continuity and provide an opportunity to improve progression in children's learning. In the next chapter, I explore the literature related to two themes, *how young children learn* and *play as pedagogy,* which are relevant in addressing the research problem.

Chapter 3: Playful pedagogies-understanding how young children learn

Overview

In this chapter, literature related to two key themes which are linked to the specific issue of transitions are discussed. The first theme, *how young children learn* acknowledges that young children are learners from birth, and the ways in which significant adults and the social environment empower the developing child. The second theme, *play as pedagogy* explores the idea that an early years curriculum which is predicated on learning through play is beneficial for the developing person.

3.1   Understanding how young children play and learn

A major contribution to practitioners' and teachers' understanding of how children learn is Bruner's (1971) theory of learning. Bruce (2004), suggests theorists such as Bruner have helped practitioners and teachers to make sense of what they observe and to challenge them to think 'deeply' about their practice. Bruner contends that babies and children learn by revisiting skills they gain through discovery and exploration with the help of a known adult or competent peer. They learn best when the activities on offer are set within a 'cultural context' building on what the child already knows, can do and are interested in (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014: 88; Scottish Government, 2014a). Bruner's layering effect or 'spiral curriculum' resonates well with pedagogical practice observable in many Scottish early learning and childcare settings today (Stephen, 2010). It is likely then that Bruner's thinking about the key role of the adult in supporting and extending children's

learning was influenced by Vygotsky. For example, Bruner's focus on building on what children can already confidently know and can do. Bruner's work has informed and shaped both social and education policy and practice at local, national and international levels (David *et al*., 2005). One other aspect to consider of Bruner's (1983) early work, in relation to the social inequalities faced by children as they grow and learn, was his belief that a child's early education was pivotal to their future success (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014). However, of relevance to this study, is the value attributed to continuity of children's learning and the existence of a curriculum that ensures equality of opportunity (Scottish Government, 2016). A reality which continues to challenge those with responsibility for implementing a continuous, coherent and responsive 'early level' curriculum.

Trevarthen's (1980) work concerns infant communication; more specifically 'the shared meaning which is created between an infant and an adult in their interactions with each other' (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014: 97). Trevarthen (1980, 2018) asserts that the quality of relationships between a baby and the primary care-giver, often the mother, is key to ensuring emotional well-being, forming strong attachments and developing a child's early communication and language skills. His thinking has provided the basis for ELC policy and practice, one such example is the focus on relationships and attachment in National Practice documents in Scotland. These include, the *Pre-Birth to Three Guidance*, (Scottish Executive, 2009) and *Building the Ambition*, (Scottish Government, 2014a)

A baby begins its learning from the womb and continues on this journey at birth. A baby's innate social need needs to be acted upon during childhood for learning to take place. Boyuslawski asserts:

> There is no second chance at childhood. It comes and goes quickly. The growing and becoming child cannot wait for what he or she needs now. Later will be too late. If he or she does not get sufficient food and protection when he or she is young, everything we would want for them later may be out of reach. If he or she does not have the chance early in life for the development of mind, body and relationships with others, we cannot make it up to him or her later. The years of his or her life which are the most impressionable, when they are most ready and eager to learn, will have been lost beyond recall. (1975:2).

Goldschmeid and Jackson claim that those working with young children require to understand their role, as supporters of learning 'the child develops autonomously as an individual with his or her own driving force, needing adults as supporters not instructors' (2003:10). Stephen (2010) goes further and points out that practitioners need to be able to articulate and reflect on their actions and to use these reflections to enhance their pedagogy. This assertion which receives significant acknowledgement and support from researchers, academics and others with a responsibility for developing professional guidance for practitioners and teachers has resonance with this study on curriculum continuity (Bruce, 2004; Education Scotland, 2013; Wall, 2012; White, 2016).

Dewey's pedagogic code asserts that 'through the responses that others make to his own activities, he [the child] comes to know what these mean in social terms….for instance, through the response which is made to the child's instinctive babbling the child comes to know what those babblings mean; they are transformed into articulate language and thus the child is introduced into the consolidated wealth of ideas and emotions which are now summed up in language', (Dorkin, 1961: 20). Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that 'the role of the adult is crucial' in a child's language learning process is widely accepted, though his view of the child as an isolated, albeit socially constructed entity has rightly been challenged (Bruce, 2004; White, 2016). Generally though there is a consensus amongst theorists and researchers that the adult or knowledgeable 'other' in the child's world is pivotal in supporting or 'co-constructing' a child's learning and their subsequent success or otherwise and that would include those who have a role to play in planning and delivering the curriculum especially during times of transition (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Dockett and Perry, 2002; Einarsdottir, 2011a; Education Scotland, 2015, 2016).

Children's acquisition of knowledge and skills is influenced by a number of elements. Dunn (1993) proposes that these elements include, environmental, emotional, sociological, physical and psychological aspects. In order to make sense of their learning children need to process the information and so from the very earliest stages babies and young children must learn how to learn and be empowered to exert agency over their learning (Wall, 2012).

3.1.1 The agentic learner: Permission to play

Fabian (2002) demonstrates that children starting school should be empowered by those with responsibility for their transition to have agency, a measure of control, a choice over what is happening to them as they start school. According to Blaisdell (2016) childhood studies researchers have dedicated significant time and effort to exploring the concept of agency. Wyness (2015) asserts that agency differs from children's participation, whilst acknowledging they are closely related. In agreement with Wyness (2015), Blaisdell asserts that 'children's participation in society is shaped not only by their agency, but also by social relations which may constrain or enable that agency and participation' (2016: 28). In the context of this study, a speculative definition of *agency* is one which recognises that children in transition possess expert knowledge of themselves as learners and when empowered to make choices, they do so through their interactions, their relationships with others within changing social networks to build agency. The extent to which children's agency is produced, is determined by the context and shifting positions or identities that they hold within their lived environments, over time (Oswell, 2013).

In conducting research with children about their learning, researchers have shown that children's agency during the transition to school changes. Others point out that children experience a loss of involvement and choice over what and how they learn, (Dunlop, 2003; Einarsdottir, 2011b; Barr and Borkett, 2015; McNair, 2016). Einarsdottir (2003) recommends that during transition children's views need to be taken seriously, and that by doing so we are

respecting their agency, giving them permission to make choices about their learning. Findings from another of Einarsdottir's (2011b) studies with forty children aged 5 and 6 in their preschool year demonstrated that there are many reasons for giving children a voice, which include giving them a sense of ownership and as a means of respecting their views, a right that has been enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Einarsdottir's study also found that children in first grade classrooms encountered greater structure in their social environment and in the ways teachers planned for their learning, when compared with the free play environment they enjoyed in playschool. First grade teachers decided the activities, and as a consequence children had little agency or influence over what was happening in the classroom (Einarsdottir, 2011b).

The perspectives of the children in Einarsdottir's study reflect similar findings from a study by Stephen *et al.* (2010), which supported the view of school exuding a restricting learning environment where there were fewer opportunities to move about, or for children to take ownership of the *how* and *what* of learning. Stephen found that teachers were not sufficiently focussed on the *why* of learning. External pressures on teachers were cited as a contributory factor for the existence of assessments and a structured timetable of learning activities that foregrounded 'what' children needed to know. The complexity of the early stages teacher's role is highlighted by Peters (2002), who found that, on the one hand, teachers are expected to foster children's learning and their cognitive transition, but on the other hand, they were also expected to support the sociocultural shift to a new

environment. As Peters and others have shown, this raises questions about the role of the teacher and her collaboration with practitioners and parents during the child's pre-school year and beyond.

McNair (2016) cautions against power laden transitions policies which 'homogenise children at school entry', whereby children are programmed by the system to act in particular ways on entry to school. She advocates for a pedagogical approach which values children's creativity, acknowledges the existence of power differentials, and establishes a shared process, where the child's voice is heard and listened to by all (2016: 26). Carr *et al.*, (2009) stress the importance of play during the transitions process, as it is valuable for supporting children's dispositions of reciprocity, imagination and resilience. The authors found that the demands of the school curriculum place undue pressure on children's dispositions and that teachers would do well to recognise this by offering children the space to play.

Studies in the last two decades widely recognise that children are capable, strong, and able to express opinions, thoughts and feelings (Clark and Moss, 2001; Einarsdottir, 2003; Fisher, 2009; Moss, 2013; McNair, 2016). Dunlop (2003) points out that children need to have opportunities to acquire factual and conceptual knowledge within an environment that promotes their active involvement in a curriculum where learning *how to learn* is foregrounded in practice. The focus by Peters *et al.*, (2018) on acknowledging the *funds of knowledge* children bring with them to school provides a persuasive argument for a responsive environment, offering possibilities for the child to

have ownership of their learning, to have a say, to acquire the skills and knowledge they need or to engage in activities they are motivated by.

Hayes (2003) suggests children are agents who act and respond in particular ways in their nursery and in school environments which differ from their actions in their home environment. Fabian (2002) highlights that children choose particular roles in each environment, reflecting the culture which is familiar to them. In so doing, children make sense of their surroundings and when this freedom to make decisions about their lives is removed, they are less likely to develop the resilience they need to adjust to the culture of the school. It is not surprising then that Peters (2000) in her study of 23 children and their teachers concluded that adults hold the power to enhance children's transition to school experience. Peters (2000), in agreement with Hayes (2003), argues that limited active participation of children in directing their own learning goes wider than the teacher because as she points out, the process of starting school is dynamic and cannot be viewed in isolation.

Practitioners and teachers also need to recognise that children bring with them to school a knowledge of their own identity as a learner, an identity forged through interacting with the culture of home, of nursery (Peters, 2010). It is not unreasonable then to assume that if this knowledge of self is ignored or undervalued by teachers, then the child will likely experience a sense of loss of learner identity as they move to school. Fisher asserts that teachers in their interactions with the transitioning child should respect and preserve that identity in ways that empower the child as they learn and to make sense

of the new ways of school, thereby 'reconstructing their view of themselves as a learner' (2009: 144). Dunlop talks of 'bridging cultures' (2003: 84) and I would add the need to bridge pedagogical cultures. While there has been some progress in creating a bridge between practitioners in the early learning and childcare sector and teachers in the early stages classes in primary schools in Scotland, where shared understandings, are beginning to emerge. The importance of empowering children to draw on the resources they bring with them to school is still an underdeveloped concept in transitions practices (Dunlop, 2017). The notion of empowering children by listening to their voices has gathered momentum in recent years (Moyles, 2010; Peters, 2015). However, Howard (2010) found that there is still some way to go in acting on the views of children starting school. In order for children to truly have agency, they need to be full members of the communities where their voices count (Barr and Borkett, 2015).

In bringing this section to a close, Barr and Borkett, advocate for giving children the 'opportunity to act out situations, to develop new skills and knowledge…to give them ownership of the activities on offer…so they can become autonomous learners, which can raise their self-esteem and self-confidence' (2015: 277) as truly agentic learners in environments where play is valued and employed purposefully to support and extend learning.

3.2   'Play' as pedagogy

The Scottish Government advises that care and education should be indivisible (Scottish Government, 2014) This position supports the thinking

that play and learning should not be seen as isolated from the other (Bruce, 2004). As Bruce reminds us, the concept of 'play' is much confused and often debated, it is an 'umbrella' word 'impossible to pin down' (2004: 129). Play is often viewed by some as not important, preferring to place greater value on learning by rote, through direct instruction rather than 'guided interaction' (Stephen, 2010). Parents of children starting school expect their child to play less and learn more in school. Bruce (2004) asserts that play is widely misunderstood by educators. Terms such as 'free-play' and 'purposeful play' have been used and overused by educators in both the early learning and childcare and primary school sectors, raising questions about practice, particularly if play means different things to practitioners and to early stages teachers (Goouch, 2010). Similarly, if as Moyles *et al.*, (2002) suggest that parents expect children in school to have a period of free play at the morning break and then to resume their learning in class then the value of play is at risk of being separated from learning. P1 teachers often refer in their planning to 'soft start' play events, as if these will somehow ease children into the real business of learning. Teachers refer to *active learning* activities which are badged as 'learning through play', offering children in P1 time-limited opportunities to play with resources that often compare poorly with those experienced in their nursery setting (Stephen, 2010). Stephen observed children having the freedom to 'choose' during active learning sessions, however, when asked, children held opposing views to those of their teachers, regarding what was 'play' and what was 'work' (2010: 26).

With regard to play, one of the fundamental concepts espoused by Froebel (2005) was that children should be allowed to express themselves freely through their play and he recognised the importance of play using natural materials as a vehicle for their learning and development. He argued that play is the highest level of learning. When babies and children are deeply engrossed in their play, learning takes place. Government policy has responded to Froebel's thinking. There is now an expectation that babies and children who attend modern day early learning and childcare settings should be empowered by practitioners to be creative, to explore, to be curious indoors and outside in gardens and in a variety of play spaces (Scottish Government, 2014).

Over the years researchers and theorists including Goldschmeid have supported Froebel's theory on children's early learning while others have found aspects of his theory, unacceptable. In the middle of the 19th century his kindergartens were banned. Isaacs (1930) was a supporter of Froebel and she was critical of those who believed that play and work were separate concepts. Froebel advocated for flexible and responsive adults who use their knowledge of the child to best effect in supporting their play and learning (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014:22). In sharp contrast, Spencer (1861) held the view that play was a vehicle for letting off steam and that by allowing children to play they were more able to concentrate on the work the adults had set for them. Such outdated thinking, is still evident (Moyles *et al.*, 2002; Fisher, 2013; Anning, 2015).

Moyles expresses frustration that decades on since the publication of her book, *Just Playing* that the value of play as a 'unique process in children's learning and development' is questioned or ignored in favour of didactic teaching methods, used with children as young as 4 years old in primary schools (2015:14). Despite the recognition which many studies and indeed curriculum policy claim about the value of play 'as a beginning, as a process, and an outcome' (Howard and King, 2015: 125), practitioners and teachers do not always think about *why* play is so important for children and too often get caught up in *what* and *when* children should play. In agreement with Howard and King, Moyles (2015) suggests there is a need to consider more 'playful and creative pedagogies in the early years if we are to support children effectively now and into adulthood' (2015: 21).

Stewart and Pugh define pedagogy as 'the understanding of how children learn and develop, and the practices through which we can enhance that process (2007:9). Their definition is rooted in values and beliefs about what we want for children, and supported by knowledge, theory and experience. In defining the term, *pedagogy*, there remains the challenge of the practitioner's or teacher's style of practice. Moyles argues this can be a fundamental barrier to implementing 'playful pedagogies' which are considered 'creative and innovative for both teaching and learning' (2015: 21). Playful pedagogy values children's contributions to their own learning and offers opportunities for children to take ownership of their learning. Arguably then, as alluded to above, Froebel's early work has relevance for practitioners and teachers alike, particularly with regard to the recent focus

on play-based pedagogy observable in the early stages of some Scottish primary schools and prevalent in nursery settings (Grogan and Duncan, 2017). In agreement with Stephen *et al.*, (2010), the depth of understanding of why play is so intrinsically important is lost in practice and weakly articulated by practitioners and teachers.

Children's play and learning experiences are scrutinised by external agencies such as the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland who conduct snapshot inspection activities which evaluate the quality of educational provision. Disappointingly, however, the existence of these reports has yet to generate a strong rhetoric amongst education authority policy makers, that extol the benefits of effective playful pedagogies as a driver for improving children's earliest encounters in the primary school sector. Education Scotland's independent evaluations and published inspection reports hold those with responsibility for leading and managing nurseries and schools accountable for the quality of a child's play and learning experiences. In reading a sample of published inspection reports, I was interested to discover that there were considerable variations in the quality of children's curriculum experiences in P1. Furthermore, in the early stages of primary schools, teachers were advised to consider adopting play-based pedagogy to ensure greater continuity and progression in children's learning as they moved between the ELC sector and P1.

The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence Early Level is built around the principles of a socially constructed learning experience (Priestley, 2018).

National guidance documents claim that children will gain a broad range of life skills and attributes, which according to *Building the Ambition*, should take account of their interests and development needs (Scottish Government, 2014a). The OECD in its 2017 report identifies that internationally there are still many challenges for children starting school (OECD, 2017). The report suggests that while progress has been made in improving transitions practice there remains a lack of collaboration between practitioners and teachers in the early stages of primary schools. In addition, the report states that there is a need for a consistent and shared understanding of the concept and relevance of play in the early stages classes in primary schools. These findings concur with the findings of several transitions studies which suggest a variance between practitioners' and teachers' pedagogical approaches, which if left unchecked will further reinforce the notion that the 'real work' of learning starts in school (Einarsdottir, 2003; Stephen, 2010; Anning, 2015).

3.3   Chapter summary

In reviewing the literature related to *how young children learn*, I have demonstrated that this is a complex, yet fundamental characteristic of childhood, which is all too often misunderstood by practitioners, teachers and parents. I have shown that *play* as a context for developing young children's learning and as a credible vehicle for planning and implementing the 'early level' curriculum experiences is undervalued and viewed as a precursor to the learning that takes place in school. Likewise, the existence of play-based pedagogies, if embraced by practitioners and teachers, offer children greater agency over their learning and opportunity to build on existing relationships

and the learning they bring with them from nursery. Invoking *play as pedagogy* has the potential to inform and change practice. Furthermore, in engaging with the literature the main aims of this study have become clear and helped to shape the research questions.

3.4   The research questions

From the review of the literature and in particular, the themes, *how children learn* and *play as pedagogy*, the specific aim of this research was therefore :

To explore whether there are barriers and challenges in achieving curriculum continuity across the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence.

The exploration is guided by the literature review and shaped by the following specific research questions:

Research question 1: *How do practitioners and teachers in two Scottish nursery settings and three associated primary schools ensure curriculum continuity and progression in children's learning across the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level?*

Research question 2: *What do parents do to support their children as they transition across the 'early level' curriculum from nursery to P1?*

Research question 3: *How is the continuity of children's learning, their agency and social capital affected by their transition across the 'early level' from nursery to P1?*

Chapter 4: Theoretical framework

Introduction

Globally, studies suggest there is a strong correlation between the influence of the social environment on the transitioning child, the child's ability to exercise agency over their learning and the existence of a child-centred curriculum delivered through responsive pedagogy and a successful transition to school. Motivated by the importance of the social environment, the role of children's agency at times of transition and the way the curriculum is designed to support young children learn, I began by exploring the work of Bronfenbrenner, Bourdieu and Bruner, assessing their theories for their appropriateness, complementarity and limitations in relation to this study.

During the data gathering and data analysis stages of this study, I realised my early attempts at creating a theoretical framework from the work of the aforementioned theorists needed to be refined. The work of Bruner (2006a, 2006b) was pertinent in so far as his curriculum theory supported the curriculum continuity focus of this study. However, I concluded the addition of Bruner's theory was unnecessary as it did not sit as well with the research questions. I have drawn on Bruner's philosophy in this thesis where I deem it helpful in supporting my findings.

As my thoughts crystallised I became more and more convinced of the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998) as the principal structure for this study.

Of particular relevance, is Bronfenbrenner's belief that wider society, and the sociocultural context also influence children's development (Hinde, 1992). He considered the role that those in and beyond the child's immediate environment play in influencing and shaping their development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stresses the vital role of interactions and strong relationships between participants, viewing the child as active and contributing to these interactions in a meaningful and respectful way.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model places the developing child at the centre of a system of closely connected levels of influence, the home and family being the closest. For this study, I suggest his first level, the microsystem contains the nursery setting, the child's home and family, while the child inhabits a second microsystem containing the primary school and their family. In each microsystem, I propose the child experiences the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level curriculum differently, illuminating the possibilities of two distinct *traditions* of the 'early level': the nursery 'early level' and the P1 'early level'. Furthermore, I theorised that I needed to take account of what happens to the child in the interconnecting space between the two microsystems, the mesosystem, as a result of transitioning from nursery to P1. I was interested in what and how children learn, their relationships with practitioners and teachers, but also on why children's agency and social capital alters during transition. I draw here on Bourdieu's work to understand what it is like to be a child in transition through the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence. By combining components of both

theories, I built a theoretical foundation on which to base my analysis of the research data and discussion of the research findings.

4.1 Building a theoretical framework: Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development

Based on my professional practice, I believe the child's early curriculum should reflect the child's world. It should be organic, evolving over time, responding to their needs, interests, preferences and motivations. Further, the curriculum should provide the child with continuity of experience and progression in their learning. Curriculum for Excellence intends to build on the child's existing skills, attributes and competences and so the curriculum on offer should be relevant, responsive, and continuous. It should scaffold the child's learning through activities which deepens their learning and extends their thinking viewing children as active participants in their own development (Hayes *et al.*, 2017).

In constructing this framework, many theories were considered for their relevance and like many academics studying the topic of transition to school, I found aspects of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development useful in conceptualising children's transition to school (Dunlop, 2002; Einarsdottir, 2003; Fabian, 1998, 2003; Dockett and Perry, 2007b; Barr and Borkett, 2015). Bronfenbrenner's model offers a framework within which I could link bioecological theory to early education curriculum and practice, from an environmental and pedagogical perspective. By adopting a bioecological framework I can show how the lived environment influences children's curriculum transition from nursery to primary school and in addition

through a sociocultural lens, how children are supported by their families to navigate the social and cultural norms and networks which exist in the environments children encounter. It was important to conceptualise how children in transition adjust as they move from familiar environments to not so familiar environments. Children in transition leave behind the routines and systems which are familiar to them in the nursery environment or context. They then enter the primary classroom environment, another context where the rules, the institutional structures, systems and pedagogy are culturally different.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) was critical of theory that ignored the function of the context in supporting and interacting with the developing child. He believed that any study of the developing person required to be located within environmental systems. Successive refinements of his 'nested' ecological systems model resulted in 'a critical distinction between 'environment' and 'process', with the latter occupying a central, driving position in development' (Hayes *et al.*, 2017: 9). More recently, the precise relationship of the systems to one another in the nested system have been challenged. Neal and Neal (2013) propose a reformulation of the ecological systems model to one which they portray as an overlapping arrangement of Bronfenbrenner's nested system. Such a proposition is offered with the intention of moving from a theory to 'measureable methodology' (Neal and Neal, 2013:733). So while the proposed reformulation offers an interesting alternative viewpoint, this study did not set out to quantify social interaction.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) argued that human development especially young children's development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between the child and their immediate environment. He refined his definition of the ecology of human development to foreground the individual and to highlight the importance of high quality interaction over extended periods of time:

> The ecology of human development is the study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, *throughout the life course*, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded.
> (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:107).

Certain aspects of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological systems theory (Figure 1) are therefore useful for this exploratory study because they offer a model for understanding how the social contexts for learning, relationships, interaction, and culture of the environment act together as mediating factors in supporting the developing individual. From an ecological viewpoint, the above definition suggests there is likely to be an impact on the individual as a result of experiencing a new set of relationships, curriculum expectations and routines. Locating the study within a bioecological framework highlights the influence of the environment over time on the developing child rather than the actions of the individual child (Darling, 2007:204). I will draw principally on

the microsystem and mesosystem in my work, but for completeness I will offer an overview of the other systems here rather than in any depth in the findings chapters.
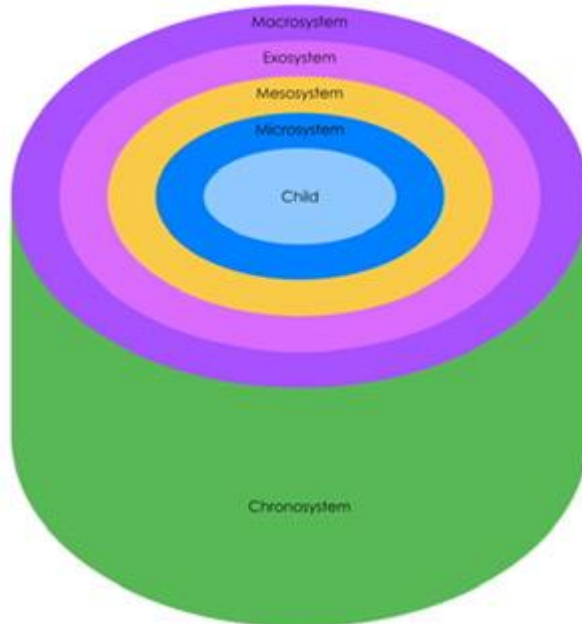
Figure 1-Adapted from Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development (1998)

4.2   The microsystem

Bronfenbrenner characterises the bioecological environment as 'a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls' (1979:3). Neal and Neal (2013) propose an alternative *networked* model to the nested system developed by Bronfenbrenner over many years. They assert that social interaction and social development is better conceptualised as a series of overlapping structures rather than as a set of concentric systems that sit within each other. They claim that by portraying the systems as nested rather than networked obscures the relationships between the systems.

However, Neal and Neal (2013) do acknowledge Bronfenbrenner's early recognition of the role of social networks, that the child's social development

depends on the existence of supportive relationships within and across more than one network or microsystems. In my view, for this study, one of the most useful elements from the set of nested structures is the 'microsystem' as it resembles the immediate centre of the child's world, where they are considered by Bronfenbrenner as active participants in their lives. This is important when exploring how the home, nursery and school has influenced the child's knowledge, skills and competencies. The child's home, for example, will have helped to shape the child as a learner and will be a factor in determining how well the child copes with and adjusts to the transition from home to nursery and from nursery to school.

Dockett and Perry (2004) propose children simultaneously inhabit three microsystems, the home, nursery and school community, and their 'agency' their active involvement in shaping their learning is likely be determined by the wider mesosystem. Neal and Neal (2013) take this proposition further by suggesting that the microsystems children inhabit overlap. They assert that to see microsystems in isolation is to ignore the complexity of the social world of the child and the connections and interconnections that naturally occur when children participate in social circles.

Tisdall *et al.*, (2009) assert that while many childhood studies have promoted children's active involvement in their day to day activities they are less positive about research successfully getting to the heart of what this involvement really means for children. From this, I conclude there is a need to explore with children the factors that limit their ability within their immediate

environment to exercise agency to have some control over how and what they learn. Fabian (2003) maintains that children's agency and learning may be inhibited by cultural, traditional or societal rules, regimes and routines. I am interested in how the environment and its culture influences the ways in which the 'early level' curriculum is planned and implemented by practitioners and teachers to provide children with a continuous curriculum and progressive learning experiences. Similarly, to explore how practitioners' and teachers' pedagogical practices are underpinned and guided by Curriculum for Excellence as they empower or constrain children's agency during transition from the nursery environment to the school environment.

Bronfenbrenner asserts learning does not exist in isolation. Wozniak and Fischer interpret the child's social environment as a 'complex ecology of development comprising home, neighbourhood, school, parental work place, even the halls of government' (2014: xv) as being instrumental in determining how children are shaped as individuals. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1977) notes the existence of 'organism, environment, interaction', the positive relationships and behaviours between the child and parent, and between them and the educational setting and the educators, are important and necessary aspects in providing a context for effective learning. Broström suggests that the 'fundamental goal' of a successful transition to school is to help young children feel 'suitable' in their new environment (2002a: 52). I interpret the word 'suitable' to mean, *feeling settled and secure*. Moreover, the child's transition from the familiar to less familiar environment will be

successful if the interactions and relationships the child experiences with others sustain and promote their confidence and self-esteem.

Broström further asserts that attention should be given to a number of related elements, including ensuring continuity in the curriculum, effective communication with the home and a welcoming environment for children and families (2002a).

The child at the centre of such a complex bioecological system according to Bronfenbrenner, will be shaped by their own unique encounters with the social world around them. Hayes (2017) emphasised the importance of good practice in understanding the developing child, in particular, a responsive learning environment and a relevant curriculum for the transitioning child that is supportive and flexible enough to meet their changing needs. This view is endorsed by Kienig (2003) in her study of children's emotional, behavioural and cognitive adjustment following the move from kindergarten to school.

Bronfenbrenner recognised that children have very different personal characteristics that are unique to them, the result of varied ecological and social histories. Given that children grow up with unique chronologies and live in socio-economically different communities, there is a need in this study to be sensitive to the individual contexts within which the child develops, and how family circumstances, values and culture shape the child's personal dispositions. Also, in keeping with Bronfenbrenner's addition of the chronosystem, it is important to understand, what happens to the developing child over time (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998). Adopting a socio-

ecological approach is appropriate for this study and in keeping with Bronfenbrenner's focus in his earlier studies, where he explores the interrelationship between social contexts and cognitive development. In relation to this study, this involves taking account of the differing social contexts in which the child lives and exploring how the various microsystems that the child inhabits, support the creation of an appropriate curriculum. Bronfennbrenner and Morris (1998) conclude that a positive social context will have a positive effect over time on a child's cognitive growth. Relationships, behaviour and future potential will be influenced and guided by what happens to the developing child (Darling, 2007).

Kienig's (2003) kindergarten to school study noted children's adjustment to new relationships and environments was complex and challenging, particularly for children with social, emotional and behavioural barriers to learning. This view is further substantiated by other studies (Ladd and Price, 1987; Margetts, 2003; Hayes *et al.*, 2014). According to Hayes *et al.* (2017) Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights the vital importance of 'proximal processes' reciprocal interactions between the child and her environment. This aspect of his theory has relevance for this study because the interactive role played by the practitioner/teacher in interacting with the child and their environment affects how curriculum continuity and progression in learning might be achieved.

4.3 The mesosystem

The 'mesosystem' within Bronfenbrenner's nested system is described as a system of two or more microsystems. What happens in one microsystem is considered to have an impact on what happens in another (Schaffer, 2006; Darling, 2007; Mamat, 2011; Hayes *et al.*, 2017, 2017a). This position is similarly asserted by Dunlop who highlights the 'interrelatedness' of the social context; the child's home, school or setting and other external factors on the individual developing child (2003: 69). Neal and Neal claim that this *interrelateness* is influenced by the 'individual's patterns of social interactions with another that determine how well systems relate to one another' (2013:727).

In conceptualising the mesosystem for this study, I propose it is the connection that exists between and across the two microsystems which the child and family occupy. This is exemplified as any interaction that takes place between the child, practitioners and teachers and home to include communications such as transition records or profiles and networking between the child and other family members and exposure to externally determined education policies. A closer examination through a bioecological lens of the impact on the child of such interaction is considered essential, as I suggest, the transitioning child experiences the 'early level' curriculum and its delivery differently by those operating in, between and across the mesosystem. What occurs in the mesosystem between each microsystem in

terms of effecting curriculum continuity is central to the aims of this study and according to Hayes *et al.* is a 'very powerful concept' (2017: 15).

4.4   The exosystem

In Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, the exosystem contains at least one microsystem which does not include the child, but it does affect them. For example, if events in the exosystem are altered or influenced by external factors beyond the confines of the child's immediate environment or community, such as an education authority responding to national education policy or legislation over time these changes affect the child. Similarly, if curriculum policy dictated that children in the early stages of primary school should experience play-based pedagogy and that external scrutiny would expose weaknesses in delivery of that policy, then the influence of the exosystem has the potential to directly influence the developing child's curriculum experience.

4.5   The macrosystem

The fourth ring in the system is considered by Bronfenbrenner as the larger socio-cultural context, where the effects of issues such as poverty or socio-economic status highlight the inequalities of communities and settings within communities. In a more affluent society children may be exposed to vastly different opportunities compared to children living in less affluent communities. Tackling issues such as inequality of access to learning and barriers to achieving success is at the heart of current education policy in Scotland. Similarly, the expansion of the early learning and childcare sector

is aimed at reducing poverty related issues, while maintaining consistently high quality early education and outcomes for children through appropriate pedagogical practices. Such change is possible though it is recognised that 'pedagogical approaches to young children's learning have been influenced by the values and beliefs predominating at different times and across different cultures throughout the last two centuries' (Hayes, *et al.*, 2017: 80). Undoubtedly then, the values and customs of different communities will play a part in shaping societal norms in the macrosystem and it is proposed children's future outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998).

4.6   The chronosystem

The last element in the system which permeates all the other rings was added later by Bronfenbrenner. The chronosystem 'represents the time dimension of children's experiences' (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1988). As children progress through life, events such as transition to school or even a family member moving away may have an adverse impact on the child. At the time, the child may take the change in their stride but Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues the effects of these proximal processes may not be felt till later. This last element has been welcomed by researchers, as it addresses a criticism of Bronfenbrenner's earlier theory that didn't explain the interdependence of each of the rings and the need to understand how the processes that go on in each system can bring about change in the individual. The process of moving to school does bring about change, an assertion supported by a significant number of studies on transition to school.

The conceptual 'process-person-context-time' (PPCT) model is relevant in exploring how the participants in this study navigate their way across the nursery microsystem into the school microsystem.

Bronfenbrenner is persuasive in his assertion that 'the human mind is fundamentally social in nature…human action and thought are built on social construction though joint activity, intersubjectivity and acculturation' (1979: 19). The 'developing person' as Bronfenbrenner describes the child is significantly shaped by their early 'face to face' interactions with parents and carers, younger or older siblings and significant others. Wozniak and Fischer propose that 'children become like-minded members of their communities through joint participation in shared activities tied to the broader cultural institutions of those communities' (2014: xv). Margetts noted that adopting an ecological perspective provided recognition of the 'realities of children's lives' (2002: 7) as they negotiate not just the transition to school, but also moving between the boundaries of different types of care and education environments and home.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model is therefore an important frame for understanding how the individual environmental and social contexts can influence the developing child's early curriculum experience. There are advantages in considering how different microsystems alter the very nature of the 'early level' curriculum as it is created and delivered in each of the microsystems inhabited by the child. A major criticism of Bronfenbrenner's theory is the absence of the child's voice (Griebel and Niesel, 2003), and that

his model does not take account of how children transfer social capital, which I think is an important consideration for children starting school. While I did not set out to gather children's perspectives beyond my informal engagement with them during observations of them in their nursery and school settings, I was interested in knowing how their curriculum transition might affect their ability to have agency over *what* and *how* they learn. For that reason, the theoretical framework for this study would be incomplete if there was no exploration of how children are affected socially and culturally by their transition to school, a recognition that they should not simply be passive recipients of imposed change. To address this shortcoming, I include elements of Bourdieu's sociocultural theory, as they relate to recognising children's agency, their changing identities and use of social capital as they start school.

4.7 Building a framework: drawing on Bourdieu's sociocultural theory

Bourdieu's sociocultural theory has particular relevance within the sphere of education and I will argue there are elements of his theory that are useful to this study. In building a theoretical framework, Bourdieu's interpretation of social and cultural capital and his concept of 'field' will support my understanding of how children navigate and adjust to changes in social and cultural norms and networks which exist between the nursery settings and the primary schools. This has implications for children's agency (Dunlop, 2016).

Bourdieu defines three different forms of capital: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers as the title suggests to monetary wealth and is not directly relevant to this study. Social capital is fundamentally very relevant to this study, it concerns itself with a network of lasting relations. Bourdieu defined the concept of social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (Bourdieu 1985: 248). Bourdieu's definition contains two elements which are of significance to this study, first the social relationship itself that allows children to claim access to resources possessed by their peers and second, the amount and quality of those resources. Both of these elements accrue capital for the child (Smyth *et al.*, 2010). I am interested in how children are empowered to make use of these resources at the point of transition to school and beyond. More importantly, if the 'early level' curriculum does offer possibilities for children to have freedom and control over their learning and to exercise agency.

Bourdieu uses the word 'capital' to describe the social products of a field or system of relations through which individuals carry out social interactions (Harker *et al.*, 1990). Social products in this sense include the material and ideational: thoughts, actions, objects, and any product of human activity. Capital can be seen as a concept being used to give 'material base to an ideational reading of social action' (1985: 2). Bourdieu writes about social activity as a game where relationships are built up and there is a reciprocal exchange explicitly and implicitly. The game or activity is conducted in a

'field' the structurally identifiable space which marks out the sphere of activity.

In this study an analogy is made with the sphere of activities as they relate to curriculum transition and the relationships between the child within an educational setting, the home and community. This notion is supported by Grenfell and James (2004) who write that education is a *field*, made up of identifiable interconnecting relations which do not operate in isolation. These authors suggest these principles possess power which emerge from the interaction between the various players. In the case of education, external factors such as figures of authority and those delivering and receiving education who may exist both inside and outside of the field in the *subfields* hold power, they have their own way of doing things, rules, assumptions and beliefs. These products generated within the field or subfield all have value 'purchasing power' which can be used by the players (Grenfell *et al.* 1998:20). Bourdieu calls this 'capital'.

Also of interest to me is Bourdieu's focus on how the culture of the different socially constructed environments children encounter can have either a positive or negative impact on their progress in learning and cognitive development.   As argued by Baldwin 'the method of progress of society…analogous to [that]…in the child…is a circular movement of give-and-take between society and the individual.   The form of collective organisation cannot be social…without first having been individual…and the matter of social organisation cannot be individual…without having first been

social' (1897:543). Practitioners and teachers are still searching for the solutions that will address the economic, social and cultural inequalities which prevail in modern society. However, in relation to this study, the intention is to explore how children draw on their social capital and agency to successfully navigate their way through the 'fields' between nursery and school.

By including aspects of Bourdieu's sociocultural theory, I intend to explore how practitioners and teachers, parents and children in the study execute their role in determining the content and continuity of children's experience across the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level. I seek to explore how children's agency changes as they experience and influence what was always intended as a socially constructed curriculum. And in line with the OECD (2015) a curriculum that responds to and builds on children's prior knowledge and learning, valuing and respecting the experiences they bring with them from home and their communities.

At the individual microsystem level, adopting a sociocultural approach as offered by Bourdieu provides an opportunity to explore the pedagogical practices in two socially and culturally different sectors of education in Scotland. Adopting a sociocultural frame will provide an opportunity to consider the sector specific challenges facing practitioners and teachers in planning and implementing the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level.

Bourdieu's constructivist structuralism is built on his understandings of culture. Grenfell *et al*., describe culture as 'the way the organisation of

society gives rise to ideas which in turn shapes the organisation of society' (1998:10). The Scottish education system has been described as unique (Chapter 1) and as such it could be argued that the culture in Scotland's schools and communities are similarly unique, reflecting the diversity of the Scottish population living and working in rural and urban communities. The Curriculum for Excellence rhetoric promotes uniqueness and diversity, the guiding principles which encourage schools to design, by involving all stakeholders, a curriculum that reflects the individual context of each nursery and or school in its community. The nursery or school's social environment should be apparent in the content and delivery of the curriculum, suggesting that a 'one size fits all' curriculum is to be avoided if the vision of a socially constructed curriculum is to be realised.

This raises a number of rhetorical questions with regard to the pedagogical practice of the 'implementers' of the 'early level' curriculum. How effective are practitioners and teachers at designing and implementing a socially constructed curriculum? And to what extent are they pressured to deliver a curriculum where the pace of implementation is driven by local and national targets to raise attainment? The impact of a top down system will inevitably influence the culture and the environment of the school. An environment that is forced by external structures is therefore not truly representative of the 'structured structure' (Grenfell *et al.*, 1998:11) creating an environment which is more in line with what Bourdieu refers to as the 'functionalist tradition…as a pervasive force in maintaining social control' (Grenfell *et al.*, 1998:11). By opening up a dialogue with practitioners and teachers it may be possible to

gain a deeper understanding of how they value play and provide a platform on which to discuss the relevance of a target driven curriculum as opposed to one which views children as 'autonomous, social actors who influence their circumstances as well as being influenced by them' (Hayes *et al*., 2017 :81).

Bourdieu contends that the culture of an environment should be reflexive as opposed to static. Bourdieu's theory of practice exhorts us to consider the culture, the theory behind and within our practice and challenges us to be socially and culturally responsive and reflexive in the delivery of the curriculum. His theory is persuasive when viewed alongside the very thrust of this study, which intends to explore the environmental, social and cultural barriers that impede curriculum continuity across the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence. Further, I would add that the resources that children and their parents possess are instrumental in determining how well they navigate the transition to school.

Bourdieu (1984), asserts that cultural capital can be 'embodied, objectified and institutionalised'. He claims that cultural capital is the product of education and is connected to the individual's character and their dispositions; it is connected to objects such as qualifications gained and connections to institutions such as places of learning (Shusterman, 1999). Bourdieu believed that capital attracts capital and the various forms are 'interconvertable'. This belief has justifiably attracted some criticism (Grenfell *et al*., 1998; Portes, 1998). The argument is that the child who is lacking in resources, who has nothing to trade or convert is disadvantaged from the

beginning of their educational journey. It is widely accepted that children enter the education playing field holding varied socio-economic positions (Rothe *et al.*, 2014). This dichotomy raises questions for me with regard to the child's ability to adjust emotionally and socially to the demands of being a primary school pupil.

I believe the confident, resilient child enters the classroom with a reserve of social and cultural capital resources at their disposal. However, the challenge for the child who holds a different type of social capital is to fit into an unfamiliar environment. An environment where their ways of behaving are at odds with the system, the structures and routines of the classroom. Bourdieu (1985) asserts that education systems do not offer a sufficiently level playing field, especially for the child whose knowledge, skills and competencies are lacking or are different to those demanded in new situations. The transitioning child must learn a new set of rules as a result of moving between fields. The child must draw on both their social and cultural capital to cope with the demands of the school day. The transitioning child is expected to adjust to an environment where their learning is structured around a more rigid timetable, which some children may find challenging. In concluding this section, I have identified that Curriculum for Excellence was intended as a socially constructed curriculum, and so this theoretical framework of necessity reflects the influence of relationships and interactions on the developing child.

4.8 The emergence of a theoretical framework

In order to build a theoretical framework for this study, I have presented the merits of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development (1998) and the relevance of elements of Bourdieu's sociocultural theory. By combining elements of these theories, I propose a framework for conceptualising how the environment interacts with the child, as they adjust to a major ecological transition in their lives. Figure 2 below illustrates how the elements of the two frameworks combine to create the theoretical framework that underpins this study. In this bioecological/sociocultural model the child is placed at the centre of each microsystem. I previously suggested that two 'early level' traditions exist. I propose that each tradition of the 'early level' sits within a separate microsystem which includes the child, family and peers and, where the child's agency and social capital are not fixed, rather they are influenced by the experiences, the relationships and the interactions which occur in and between each interconnected microsystem which the child inhabits and the surrounding mesosystem. The bidirectional arrow in the diagram represents the sociocultural influences on the child's agency and social capital as a result of the interconnections between the two microsystems (Bourdieu, 1985).
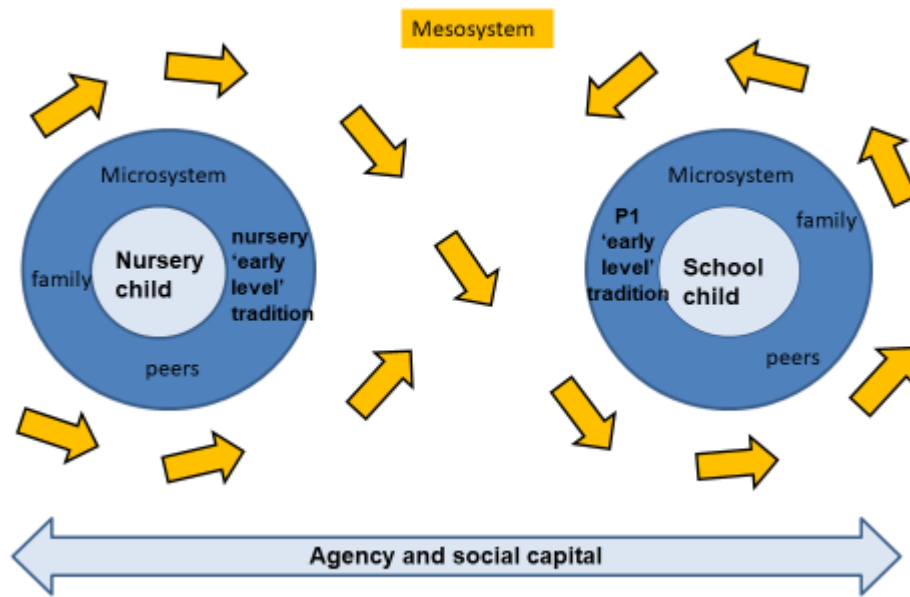
Figure 2-Bioecological/sociocultural model: version 1

According to Slesnick *et al*. 'an individual's relationships in every setting are impacted by relationships in other settings in that individual's life. There is a chain of [sociocultural] activity that individuals drag with them across microsystems' (2007:1238). Adopting a bioecological frame resonates with the existence of two 'early level' traditions, which children in transition experience, and is the central focus of this study. Including a sociocultural element will strike a balance between understanding the *bioecological* influences during this 'early level' curriculum transition and understanding the *sociocultural* influences which emerge from the *field* where relationships are formed between practitioners, teachers, parents and children.

Chapter 5: Research methodology

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology adopted for the research. It justifies the use of qualitative methods and the case study design, to address the research questions which were derived from my reading of a selection of the current and seminal literature on the subject of transition to school. The research methods, data collection and analysis techniques for this exploratory research study are also described. This chapter also describes how I minimised the potential impact on data collection, analysis and interpretation given my professional role and how I addressed the issues of power by positioning myself as the partially participating adult. The ethical procedures which I followed are also explained.

5.1   Adopting an interpretivist paradigm

Bryman (2012) contends that interpretive research is open-ended and does not seek to generalise the outcomes of the research process. An interpretive paradigm allows the researcher to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants in their unique context or culture (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Miles *et al.*, 2014). In agreement with Hoy, I aimed to adopt the most appropriate paradigm (Given, 2017) for my research focus, which reflected the exploratory nature of this study and also fitted with my ontological position that there are many ways to view the developing child's learning experiences:

'I do not believe that there is any one best way to do research.

The appropriate method of research depends on the purpose of the

study' (Hoy, 2010: preface).

Cohen *et al.* (2011) assert that interpretivist researchers seek to understand how individuals, relate to, experience and interact with their social world, during times of transition. Interpretivist research is subjective in its approach and focuses on building up a picture of human behaviour it aids understanding of the *how* and *why* of relationships and interaction with the lived environment. In selecting an interpretivist paradigm, I intended to explore the perspectives of the parents, practitioners and teachers who experience the transition to school process, to embrace the multiple realities of the situation (Thanh and Thanh, 2015; Harrison *et al.*, 2017).

5.1.1 An insider/outsider researcher or somewhere in between

The literature on the subject of 'insider-outsider researcher' explores and challenges the traditional notion of hierarchy and power in qualitative research. Kersetter (2012) promotes the notion of community members being fully involved as equally powerful participants in research activities. There are advantages and disadvantages for both positions. An outsider may be better positioned to be neutral and detached, while the insider arguably has the advantage of knowing the context, the people on the ground, but could also be exposed to claims of bias. I wonder if it really is possible to retain a *detached attitude* throughout the data gathering phase (Kersetter, 2012). Merriam *et al.* (2001) assert it is not easy to delineate between the insider or outsider researcher. Being a researcher is a complex

position and there are inherent challenges that include position, power and representation, particularly 'when conducting research within one's own culture' (ibid, 2001: 406). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest that a more realistic place for the researcher is in the 'space between', which has the merits of being responsive to the context. The researcher can then move in and out of the context being studied, engaging with the participants with a less threatening identity, thereby developing trust and avoiding any hidden transcripts, redressing issues of power and creating an environment where the participants can speak freely (Kersetter, 2012). In the context of this study, I was aware that achieving the right balance in terms of my 'researcher' position and my potentially 'power laden' professional role as an inspector of schools, were important aspects which I took account of in conducting the data collection, data analysis and interpretation activities (Kersetter, 2012; Mandell, 1988).

Power is a difficult concept to pin down (Thomson, 2007). All of us possess power to some extent and it is how we use this in the course of our lives that is important. Merriam *et al.* (2001) assert that traditionally held views that seniority or status carry more power than those with less authority need to be challenged if we are to achieve a more inclusive and equitable society. In conducting this research, I was acutely aware of the belief, real or otherwise that 'power to or power over' (Thompson, 2007:14) might play in shaping the participants' responses and behaviours as a person's gender, race, class or identity can be perceived as holding more power (David *et al.*, 2005; Merriam *et al.*, 2001).

The insider/outsider position or the space in the middle I held was important to define. On the one hand, perhaps I was an insider, I shared a frame of reference with the participants who valued the importance of early education. However, it was important not to assume 'access will be granted, meanings shared and validity of findings assured' (Merriam, 2002:406). On the other hand, as an outsider, a doctoral student and school inspector with known links to a totally different culture, I potentially held the power to set the agenda, to be biased in some way which might result in participants behaving and responding in a way that was tokenistic or 'toeing the party line'.

I am known across the education sector in Scotland as an HMI within Education Scotland, a national scrutiny organisation, so I was aware of the tensions this arguably 'privileged' role could create with regard to the willingness of participants to take part and the risk to the integrity and honesty of the study data (Kersetter, 2012). To minimise the impact of what Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to as 'power relationships', the parents, practitioners and teachers were given the opportunity to choose the locations for interviews and whether they preferred to talk to me in a group or individually. I strived at all times to adopt the role of the professional researcher. A clear explanation was given to all participants from the beginning that the study was being conducted by a doctoral student. It was important therefore that the research design empowered the participants to engage in the study, knowing their contributions would be valued and treated ethically. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) note, the responsibility for conducting the study lies with the researcher in knowing which space to occupy. As a

result, of adopting rigorous ethical protocols, there were no issues or concerns raised by the participants about my professional role. I attribute this to communicating clearly from the beginning of the study, the purpose of the research and also explicitly valuing the contributions of each adult during the interviews with them.

5.1.2 Using qualitative methods within an interpretivist paradigm

Researchers have shown the benefits of using qualitative methods in a number of early education transition studies (Broström, 2002a; Einarsdottir, 2005; Dockett and Perry, 2007b). These qualitative studies focussed on comprehending the emotional, social and cognitive experiences of children moving to school. Qualitative methods endeavour to understand the subjective world of human experience and 'the imposition of external form and structure is resisted' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 17) by the qualitative researcher 'since this reflects the viewpoint of the observer as opposed to that of the actor directly involved' (ibid *et al.*, 2011: 17). For reasons then primarily associated with striving for depth of human understanding and richness of data, I determined that adopting qualitative methods which included the use observations and interviews to gather data, informed also by the literature review to answer the research questions, were useful (Greg, *et al.*, 2007).

Qualitative methods are considered more appropriate when working with children (Perry and Dockett, 2011; Greg, *et al.*, 2007). In adopting qualitative methods using observations of children's day to day activities to gather

information, Perry and Dockett (2011) aimed to be rigorous and achieve richness in detail and understanding rather than generalisable representation. James and Prout (2015) assert that children know themselves very well and this fact is not always recognised or acted upon. Moyles (2010) advises that by listening to what children have to say and genuinely acting on that knowledge their needs are more likely to be met.

Dunlop (2003) in her large-scale qualitative study based on an ecological model stresses the interrelatedness of children's social and cultural experiences (Bourdieu, 1985) and the need to take into account the different layers, as identified in the ecological system as espoused by Bronfenbrenner (1979) around the child. Furthermore, Dunlop stresses the importance of documenting the voices of children and the potential for children 'to act as agents' of change to influence the culture of the playroom and thus their learning experience (2003: 84).

Previous studies on the topic of transitions to school have used quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Swartz *et al.*, 2015). While there are merits in viewing the world through the gathering of measureable facts, quantifiable data was not considered appropriate or necessary for this exploratory study. I was not seeking to identify statistically significant correlations between the experiences of the participants in one setting over another setting. Data collection through the use of tools such as, questionnaires or surveys or tests that could be analysed using statistical means would not have reached the participants' views, reflections or accounts of their experiences. Other

transitions studies, for example by, Griebel and Niesel, 1999; Johansson, 2002; Merryll and Timms, 2007) have used quantitative methods in early years as they required measurable data to provide an objective view of their particular research study. As Scott and Usher suggest 'the natural science model has served as a prototype for social scientists' (1998: 12). Arguably the disadvantages of such an approach when observing children are that they are not 'passive' and 'they do not behave simply or deterministically like puppets' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011:15). Cohen *et al.* suggest we should 'use ourselves as a key to our understanding of others and conversely our understanding of others as a way of finding out about ourselves' (2011: 17).

Consequently, for this study, which is located within a specific Scottish context, I adopted an interpretivist position, to explore how the environment and the social and cultural relationships that exist within the home, nursery and school work together to achieve continuity of curriculum experience for the child. I considered it important to seek practitioners', teachers' and parents' perspectives of this key transition period. To achieve this, qualitative methods were considered the most effective means of gathering data (Holliday, 2016). All of these activities in this small scale exploratory study generated significant amounts of qualitative data, which according to Freebody, tend to be 'detailed and rich' (2003:35). The review of literature also identified achieving that curriculum continuity across the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level was an understudied area that would benefit from the identification of core constructs. In order to look more closely at this particular research problem, I considered that a case study would allow me to

look more systematically and rigorously at the context, the participants, in their nursery and school environments and to consider, the 'how and why?' In adopting a case study method, Harrison *et al.* (2017) suggest 'careful consideration of the different case study approaches is required to determine the design that best addresses the aim of the study and aligns with the researcher's worldview' (2017: web article, no pagination).

5.1.3 Case study method

Case studies have been used extensively by others researching particular contexts or situations as they provide a flexible method of enquiry (Yin, 1984, 2009, 2014; Stake, 1995, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that the case study method is frequently linked to the interpretive paradigm. The authors highlight some positive features that include the descriptive nature of the narrative that is produced, the combining of the depth of description with the analysis of data and the portrayal of the views and thoughts of the participants in the writing up of the case. Merriam (2009) states that a case study can be differentiated from other methods because there are boundaries attached to the object of the research. Merriam similarly notes that 'the bounded system or case might be selected because it is an instance of some process, issue or concern' (2009: 41).

Harrison *et al.*, (2017) describe three different approaches taken by prominent case study researchers. They suggest case study approaches are governed by each researcher's philosophical position and examine three approaches. Of these approaches, I have assumed a pragmatic

constructivist position. I believe this approach best fits with the research questions, the exploratory nature of the study, and the design and data gathering methods employed in this study which aimed to 'illuminate my understanding' of what is a complex social and cultural issue (Harrison *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the utility and versatility of a common sense exploration of the participants' perspectives of the research problem ties neatly with creating 'thick' descriptions of the case.

Cohen *et al.* (2011) note the benefits of using a case study as a means of getting to 'understand real people and real situations, case studies investigate and report the real-life, complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance' (2011: 289). However, case study researchers are reminded by Nisbett and Watt (1984) to avoid misrepresentation in reporting, to ensure a balanced account of the case data, and to avoid researcher bias. This is a challenge where power relations could influence the nature of the data collected and its subsequent analysis. Case study approaches have been criticised for providing evidence that could be challenged, that is too subjective and which cannot reliably demonstrate 'cause and effect' (Travers, 2001). Any generalisations or conclusions would therefore be considered 'analytical generalisations' (Yin, 2009:15), rather than a statistical conclusion. This view is countered by Greg, *et al.* (2007) who assert that, when focussing on real-life contexts, case study methods offer the researcher an accessible and simple approach that can 'make a difference' by identifying a situation and addressing it.

5.1.4 Introducing the case study

My original intention was to have a single exploratory case study with one case, where the 'unit of analysis' (Grünbraum, 2007:88) was to be the group of thirteen children, their parents and the practitioners and teachers. I wanted to explore practitioners', teachers' and parents' perceptions of the planning and delivery of the 'early level' curriculum across the two nursery settings and three primary schools. However, after generating the data, and from early analysis of that data it was apparent that two 'early level' traditions existed across the two sectors of education: the nursery 'early level' and the P1 'early level'. I therefore created two cases.

According to Harrison *et al.* (2017) a case 'is a specific, a complex functioning thing' which investigates an issue 'phenomena, event, situation, organisation, program, individual or group' in context, where the boundary between the context and issue is unclear and contains many variables. For this study, the issue is *the existence of two 'early level' traditions* which are explored as *two cases*: the '*nursery early level*' case and the '*P1 early level*' case. The 'nursery early level' case comprises the thirteen children (while in nursery), their parents, seven practitioners and three senior staff from two nursery settings (Mistletoe Nursery and Bluebell Nursery Class). The 'P1 early level' case comprises the same thirteen children (now in P1), their parents and four P1 teachers from the three primary schools (Mistletoe Primary School, Bluebell Primary School and Buttercup Primary School). The context for the first case, are the two nursery settings and for the second case, the four P1 classes in three primary schools. It is proposed that the

boundaries are limited to the environments and connections between the two nursery settings and four P1 classes in three primary schools.

5.1.5 The participants and location

The investigation took place in central Scotland, in two Scottish local authorities anonymised here as *Riverside Council* and *Valleyfield Council*, in two nursery settings and three primary schools (Table 2). The Directors of Education in each local authority area granted me permission for the research to be conducted in Mistletoe Primary School, Mistletoe Nursery, Bluebell Primary School and Nursery Class and Buttercup Primary School. I contacted the settings and schools by email in the first instance. The process of agreeing to take part in the research activities with the senior managers in each setting and school went smoothly. The senior managers facilitated the distribution of the 'invitation to participate' letters to parents, practitioners and teachers (Appendix 1). They also collated responses to these letters and posted signed permission slips back to me for processing. Practitioners and teachers in each setting and school who were invited to take part were highly receptive to being involved in the research. Once permissions and consent/assent had been received from parents, practitioners, teachers and children, mutually convenient dates for visits to their playrooms and classrooms were quickly arranged.

First Case-nursery 'early level'	Second Case-P 1 'early level'
Mistletoe Nursery- Riverside Council Mistletoe Nursery was located in a residential suburb in central Scotland. Housing in the catchment area was a mix of private and rented accommodation; bungalows, semi-detached and flatted dwellings. Mistletoe Nursery offered part time places to children aged 3 to 5. Children were offered up to 16 hours of free early learning and childcare each week. The pattern of attendance varied with some parents buying additional hours or requesting flexibility in accessing their free allocation of 16 hours. The maximum number of children that could attend each half day session was 40. The setting shared the same campus as Mistletoe Primary School. The nursery children had access to two large playrooms, an extensive outdoor area and woodland area to support their learning. The children generally moved to Mistletoe Primary School after their time in nursery. At the time of the study, Mistletoe Nursery was managed by a head of centre, a team leader and a staff team of early years practitioners.	**Mistletoe Primary School- Riverside Council** Mistletoe Primary School was a non-denominational co-educational school located in what was considered by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to be a working class residential suburb in central Scotland. The school could accommodate up to 400 children covering the stages P1 to P7. The school had a senior leadership which consisted of a headteacher, a depute headteacher and a principal teacher. The P1 children had access to bright spacious classrooms, a shared open area outside the classrooms and direct access to the playground.
Bluebell Nursery Class- Valleyfield Council Bluebell Nursery Class offered part time places to children aged 3 to 5. Children were offered up to 16 hours of free early learning and childcare each week. The pattern of attendance varied with some parents buying additional hours or requesting flexibility in accessing their free allocation of 16 hours. The nursery class was located in a separate building, but on the same campus as Bluebell Primary School.	**Bluebell Primary School- Valleyfield Council** Bluebell Primary School was located in what is considered by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) an affluent residential suburb in central Scotland. A private housing estate and a line of local shops surrounded the school. Bluebell Primary School could accommodate up to 450 children. At the time of the study the roll was

The children had access to two large playrooms and an outdoor play space and an enclosed nursery garden. The maximum number of children that could attend daily was 54. Children regularly visited the main school building for activities, such as physical education. The headteacher had responsibility for the nursery class and primary school, though the day to day leadership and management of the nursery class was shared between a depute headteacher and a nursery teacher.	around 300 children. The P1 children were located in one wing of the school. They had access to a shared open area, which they used for a range of learning activities. **Buttercup Primary School-Valleyfield Council** Buttercup Primary School was located in what is considered by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) an affluent residential suburb in an area of mixed housing, though predominantly private houses, in central Scotland It was situated on a busy main road near a group of shops. Buttercup Primary School was a denominational co-educational school with classes from P1 to P7. The school had no nursery provision. Children from the catchment area who attend a local nursery were almost certainly guaranteed a place in the P1 classroom. Children living out with the catchment area for the school needed to apply to the education authority for a place in the school. The primary school could accommodate up to 400 children. At the time of the study, the roll was around 300 children. The P1 children were located in one wing of the school. They had access to a large shared open area which they used for a range of learning activities.

Table 2-Study location and participating local authorities

5.2   Sampling process

To reflect the exploratory nature of the study 'generic purposive sampling' (Bryman, 2012: 422) was used to select the location and participants. In purposive sampling, the participants are chosen intentionally, as they are considered to best represent a particular issue and or possess the right credentials for the study and 'sampling is crucial for later analysis' (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 27; Miles *et al.*, 2014). The two local authorities located in

central Scotland had expressed an interest in the study and were therefore purposely selected. They broadly represented local authorities in urban areas across Scotland in terms of size, the structure of their nursery and primary schools and the curriculum taught. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data showed that the socio-economic demographics of the two local authorities differed. Riverside Council had higher levels of deprivation than Valleyfield Council. The two nursery settings, two associated primary schools and a third out of catchment area primary school provided the context for the study. The third primary school was involved as one parent had made a placing request to this school for their child. In order to follow the child's curriculum transition journey, I felt it important to include the school in the data gathering activities.

Letters of invitation to participate were issued to all the parents of the forty pre-school children on the roll at the time across the two nursery settings. Thirteen families responded to this letter indicating they wanted them and their children to be involved (Table 3). To ensure a reasonable amount of data was gathered, I purposely decided to involve all of the children whose parents agreed for them to take part. It is acknowledged that the sample size is small and therefore any generalisations that are made may be worthy of further exploration and open to challenge (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Miles *et al.*, 2014). The thirteen children, seven boys and six girls were all White Scottish. They all spoke English as their first and home language. They did not represent any minority groups or different faiths. At the time of the data collection, the children were aged between 4 and 5½ years old and were in

receipt of their annual entitlement of up to 600 hours free education and childcare. They were all in what is referred to in Scotland as their 'pre-school year'. Their characteristics in terms of age and learner journey were relevant to the focus of the study.

While it has been noted above that they did not fully represent the entire socio-cultural and racial mix present in Scotland today, they did however, generally represent the population in terms of a spread across the (SIMD) quintiles in each setting and as this study was exploring curriculum continuity then the sample group was deemed relevant. Background information shared by the practitioners in each nursery setting stated that there was a range of social, emotional and cognitive abilities across the sample. This information was shared in confidence and is not described in this thesis.

Child's pseudonym	Gender	Parent's pseudonym	Nursery setting	Primary School
Belle	F	Lydia	Mistletoe	Mistletoe
Cara	F	Fran	Bluebell	Bluebell
Eddie	M	Libby	Bluebell	Buttercup
Hamish	M	Iona	Mistletoe	Mistletoe
Hildur	F	Arlene	Bluebell	Bluebell
John	M	Jan	Mistletoe	Mistletoe
Kathleen	F	Codie	Mistletoe	Mistletoe
Kelsey	F	Deborah	Mistletoe	Mistletoe
Kenny	M	Margaret	Mistletoe	Mistletoe
Lily	F	Diane	Mistletoe	Mistletoe
Lewis	M	Sandy	Mistletoe	Mistletoe
Roddie	M	Leanne	Bluebell	Bluebell
Walter	M	Patricia	Mistletoe	Mistletoe

Table 3-Child and parent participants and settings attended

All of the practitioners and primary 1 teachers across the two nursery settings and three primary schools were invited to take part. A total of fourteen

practitioners and teachers indicated they were willing to participate (Appendix 2). The practitioners in the two nursery settings were chosen because they were 'key workers' for the children selected and they had significant previous experience of supporting children through the transition to primary school. The parents were included because their child was transitioning to primary school. Critics of this sampling approach note that while actively choosing the participants provides depth to the data collected, this is in part undermined by the loss of breadth which a larger sample might provide (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). However, Bryman (2012) notes that purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research and it is useful because it places the research questions firmly at the centre of the study. In this study, the research questions focus directly on the phenomenon in question, i.e. curriculum continuity and children's transition to school. And as Miles and Huberman assert 'research questions feed directly into the data collection' (1994:23). Table 4 presents the study participants and the number in each category. The total number of participants was 40.

Participants	Number in each category
Children	13 (7 boys and 6 girls)
Parents	13
Practitioners-EYP	7
Teachers-primary class teachers	4
Senior practitioners	3
Senior staff-primary	0
Total	40

Table 4-Participants in each category

5.3 Pilot of the study materials

In early 2015 in two Scottish local authorities that were not part of the main study, a group of two teachers and three practitioners were invited to provide written comment on the suitability and relevance of the study materials. They provided feedback on the research questions, the content and general layout of the practitioner/teacher semi-structured interview schedules, semi-structured interview questions for parents and supporting documentation. In light of their feedback, the research questions were considered appropriate to the study, with minor editing. Similarly, some minor alterations were made to the wording of the nursery practitioner semi-structured interview schedule in response to feedback to make them more accessible. The 'invitation to participate' letter to parents was similarly altered to remove educational jargon and ensure clarity and accessibility.

5.4 Data collection

The data collection took place between May 2015 and October 2015. Observations of children and interview data were collected over two visits to each of the nursery settings in May/June and in one visit to their primary school in September/October. Children were not interviewed because I had gathered sufficient data during the observations. Figure 3 below shows when the data was collected, who was involved and how it was collected.
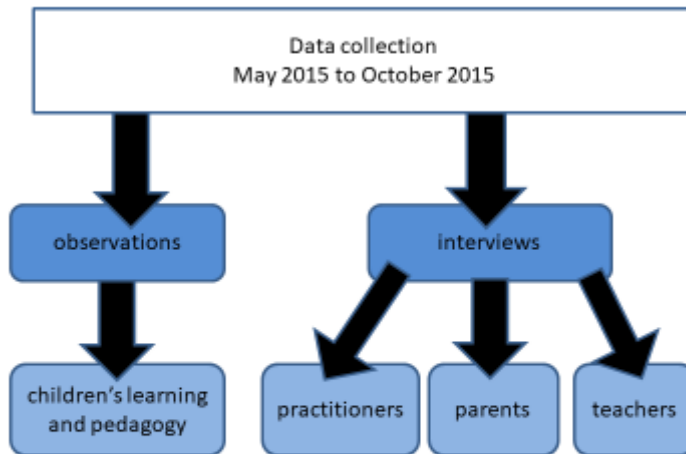
Figure 3-Data collection

5.4.1 Observations

This was not an ethnographic study, nor was it intended that children would be seen as 'co-researchers', but the belief that children are powerful agents of what and how they learn was not ignored (Harcourt and Conroy, 2011: 42). The rationale for choosing to observe the child's curriculum experience rather than include their voices could be considered a limitation of the study, thereby, creating a tension between the perspective of the researcher and foregrounding the children's perspectives as active members of their learning community. However, the aim of this study was to observe children's curriculum experiences and interpret from my perspective that experience while in their nursery setting and in P1 in school.

Observation is one of the most used tools in qualitative research as it offers an immediate connection with the activities which are the focus of the

research (Fisher, 2013). At a practical level, Fisher (2013) stresses the value of observation as an instrument for enhancing the observer's knowledge of the child as a learner. Skilful observations can capture significant moments and achievements as well as provide data on what needs to be done to support learning. The focus of my observations was on the child's lived experience.

Greig *et al.* (2007) note that observation techniques conducted in a familiar environment are especially relevant when working with young children, who may not always have the language to tell their story. This assumption is borne out by the significant body of national and international literature and studies of early years education that have used observation as a tool to collect data (Fisher, 2013, Corsaro and Molinari, 2000, 2005; Lago, 2014). Lago (2012) asserts that observation allows the researcher to get close to the participants in their natural surroundings. Through observation, the researcher is able to see and gather information that is more reliable than a second hand account of what took place in a given situation (Cohen *et al.,* 2011). When observing in education settings, the data generated can come from many sources, which include the environment itself, watching episodes of learning, from oral and non-verbal interactions, engagement with physical resources and social interactions. If effectively recorded, observation data can provide a rich narrative for analysis (Bryman, 2012).

In this study, hand written narratives were used to record data on two occasions in each of the two nursery settings and once in each of the four

primary classrooms (Appendix 3). Each nursery observation period was the equivalent of a morning session, typically three hours ten minutes (Appendix 8). In the primary classrooms, observations (Appendix 9) lasted for roughly the same amount of time, though children were not observed in the playground. I conducted six observations in total, four in the nursery settings and two in the school settings.

Children quietly and confidently accepted my presence. At times, they would engage with me or ignore my presence in the way they often chose to do with any other adult or peer who entered or left the playroom or classroom. Mandell (1988) in her study explains in great detail her role as the 'least-adult' where she was accepted by the children as a complete participant. In comparison, Savage (2011) assumed the role of the non-interfering companion. My position was in the middle ground, where I held the role of the 'partially participating' adult (Bryman, 2012:441). At times, I would observe from the edges of children's play, at other times I would be invited by children to join in with their play. I didn't feel this was an issue. Early years playrooms are typically more fluid learning spaces where children move in and out of solitary, parallel and group play, so they offered naturally occurring opportunities for observing children and others in educational settings. In comparison, P1 classrooms tended to present fewer opportunities to observe children playing.

In choosing to observe children at play, Harcourt and Conroy's advocate that children should be actively involved in research that is about children

'designing the research process to include children as active participants and collaborators, recognises the inherent competence that children can offer' (2011: 40). By observing the 'natural rhythm' of the nursery playrooms and P1 classrooms, where children played in a familiar environment, I was able to watch and listen to children interacting with each other and known adults, (Greg *et al.,* 2007:119). By observing the episodes of learning in real time, it was easier to make field notes of what children and adults were actually saying and doing, and note how children reacted to the behaviours of their peers and adults (Corsaro, 2011; Farrell, 2005). According to Moyles (2002, 2015), effective observation requires the observer to be sensitive to both the participants and the context.

5.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

It is well documented there are many advantages of interviews (Atkins and Wallace 2012; Bryman, 2012).   The practitioners, teachers and parents involved in the study took part in semi--structured interviews which lasted on average around 20-30 minutes. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to provide responses from their own perspective.   Cohen *et al.* (2011) similarly conclude that interviews are useful as they allow the interviewer to dig beneath the surface of initial responses, to explore meanings and to seek to understand by asking additional questions or inviting the respondent to add more detail to their answers. The 'richness' of responses may enhance the quality of data gathered (Bryman, 2012: 470) and that themes or patterns of experience may emerge from the participant's responses.   Cohen *et al.* stress that interviews should be conducted 'ethically' with due regard to

informed consent, and confidentiality (2012: 442). Bryman (2012). suggests the attraction for the qualitative researcher using interviews is the flexibility they provide.

There are some disadvantages in using interviews. Atkins and Wallace (2012) suggest they are time consuming to conduct and transcribe and there can be challenges in determining the codes from the vast amount of data they can produce. Another factor to consider is the trustworthiness and reliability of data. Participants may provide responses that are at odds with what they truly believe in an effort to be seen to please the researcher. I took steps to mitigate against this by conducting interviews in a non-threatening environment, in either the nursery or school staffroom and offering the option to meet in a small group or to conduct a telephone interview. Atkins and Wallace (2012) claim that informal settings signal to the interviewee that the interview is a conversation and not a confrontation. Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate as a data collection tool for this study as they potentially allowed face-to-face contact with the participants. Interviews made it easier to seek clarification, thereby reducing the risk of misinterpreting a response and giving greater robustness and reliability to the data collected (Bryman, 2012).

5.4.2.1 Parent interviews

Parents were invited to take part in two interviews, the first (Appendix 4) while their child was in the nursery setting (May/June 2015) and second (Appendix 5) when their child had moved to primary school (Sept/Oct 2015).

Of the thirteen parents approached, twelve took part in the first interview, and eight continued with the second interview (Appendix 10). The parents who consented to take part in the study were invited to say where and when they wished to be interviewed. A telephone interview was offered and the majority of the parents' interviews were conducted in this way to suit parents' personal circumstances. All the parents gave their permission for their interviews to be audio-recorded.

In Mistletoe Nursery, a group of four parents opted to be interviewed together rather than have a one to one interview. This took place in the staffroom which was a familiar location. The other five parents opted for individual telephone interviews. In Bluebell NC, two parents had a face-to-face interview and one parent had a telephone interview.

For the second interview, post transition, at Mistletoe Primary School, five parents had a telephone interview, while four parents could not be contacted for the pre-arranged telephone interview. At Bluebell Primary School, two parents had a telephone interview and one parent could not be contacted for the pre-arranged telephone interview. In Buttercup Primary School, one parent had a face-to-face interview.

Table 5 below sets out the details of the interviews that took place with the cohort of thirteen parents in the course of the data gathering activities. Before children's transition, I was able to hold interviews or meetings with twelve out of the thirteen parents, (11 mums and 1 dad). After transition,

eight of the twelve parents were interviewed a second time, while the others

dropped out of the study.

	Parent's Pseudonym	Interview 1	Interview 2	Child's Pseudonym
Mistletoe Nursery	Lydia	Group	Phone	Belle
	Deborah		Phone	Kelsey
	Sandy			Lewis
	Patricia		Phone	Walter
	Margaret	Phone	Phone	Kenny
	Jan	Phone		John
	Codie	Phone	Phone	Kathleen
	Diane	Phone		Lily
	Iona	Phone		Hamish
Bluebell Nursery	Libby	Face-to-face	Face to face	Eddie
	Arlene	Face to face	Phone	Hildur
	Fran	Phone	Phone	Cara

Table 5-Interviews and meetings with parents of the thirteen study children

5.4.2.2   Practitioner and teacher interviews

The interviews with practitioners (see schedules in Appendices 6 and 7) and

teachers took place within the working day and in a quiet area within each

setting. Practitioners and teachers (see Appendices 11 and 12 for interview

schedules) were interviewed once in either a small group or one to one

depending on what they preferred. Permission to record the interviews was

granted by all of the practitioners and teachers. I decided to be flexible

during the interviews and gauge the relevance of participants' responses in determining if it was necessary to keep to the script or to deviate. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to go beyond the set of questions, to open up the dialogue and facilitate an 'authentic voice' (Atkins and Wallace 2012; 88).

Table 6 below lists the pseudonyms of the practitioners from the two nursery settings and teachers from the three primary schools. Of the nine practitioners, eight were interviewed in small groups of up to five at their request, while the four P1 teachers all did individual interviews.

Nursery/school	Pseudonym	Interview
Mistletoe Nursery	Jill	Group of five
	Nadine	
	Joan	
	Lorna	
	Megan	
Bluebell Nursery	Janet	Individual
	Hannah	Group of three
	Mary	
	Jean	
Mistletoe Primary School	Holly	Individual
	Mandy	Individual

Bluebell Primary School	Laura	Individual
Buttercup Primary School	Alison	Individual

Table 6-Practitioner and teacher interviews

5.5   Ethical issues

In Scotland, where the research was conducted, rigorous ethical procedures require to be followed. This study was guided by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee Codes of Practice (www.strath.ac.uk/ethics). For this study, ethical approval was sought from Strathclyde University and following amendments sought by the School Ethics Committee I received ethical approval. In addition, I adhered to the guidance offered by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA).

Cohen *et al.* (2011) assert that the researcher must strike a balance between 'the demands made on them as professional scientists in pursuit of truth, and their subjects' rights and values potentially threatened by the research' (2011:75). They suggest that researchers face a number of ethical dilemmas when devising and conducting research and advise the researcher to abide by a strict ethical code. The ESRC (2015) guidance provided six key principles of ethical research that the Council would expect to be addressed. The guidance stresses that the principal ethics consideration is to minimise the risk of actual or potential harm.

The six ESRC ethical research principles are:

- that the research is undertaken voluntarily, without any coercion or undue influence,

- the research is worthwhile and provides value that outweighs any risk or harm, further that researchers should aim to minimise potential risk or harm to participants,

- appropriate information is given about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, and what is expected of the participants,

- anonymity is to be respected, though individuals' preferences in this regard are to be considered,

- the research design will meet the highest standards of integrity, and

- the researcher should make explicit any conflicts of interest.

    (adapted from ESRC 2015:4)

To ensure ethical protocols were adhered to, the following ethical issues were addressed:

- all participants were given information that clearly outlined that they are invited to take part on a voluntary basis. For children, as well in addition to receiving parental consent I sought their assent (see also Section 5.5.1). Parents were invited to complete a consent form, which outlined their right to privacy or to withdraw at any time from the study. The nature and purpose of the study was outlined in the parent information sheet (Appendix 1). Similarly, practitioners and teachers were asked to complete a consent form, which outlined their right to privacy or to withdraw at any time up to data analysis. The nature and purpose of the study was outlined in the staff information sheet (Appendix 2).

- in conducting the study I felt it was important for the participants to understand my role as a researcher and to acknowledge my position as a school inspector. I was known to senior officers and the practitioners and teachers and nationally as an employee of Education Scotland, but I was not known to the parents or children in either of the participating councils. I was aware of the tensions this role may create with regard to willingness to take part and the risk to the integrity and honesty of the study. However, a clear explanation was given to all participants from the beginning that the study was being conducted by me as a student and that the intended research was integral to the doctoral study. Careful consideration was be given to ensure an appropriate professional and ethical approach was designed into the methodology to minimise the impact of being seen as an external agent with influence and power and being the professional researcher. I acknowledge there were risks associated with me inviting the specific nursery settings and primary schools to take part. This approach was considered more appropriate than asking the local authority to select participants, in an attempt to minimise coercion. It was important for the participants to know that a respectful ethical approach would permeate all aspects of the study.

5.5.1 Seeking more than informed consent-obtaining children's assent

The issue of informed consent was particularly relevant when the research methods included observing the children and also when conducting interviews with their parents, practitioners and teachers. Corsaro asserts

researchers should 'adapt and refine methods to better fit children's lives' (2011:47). According to Corsaro (2011), the researcher needs to be alert and proactive to problems, such as upholding rights, protecting participants' right to privacy, being alert to unforeseen circumstances and obtaining informed consent.

The ESRC (2015) guidelines make no specific reference to gaining consent from the parents of children who were not part of the study. The guidance expects the researcher to minimise the risks to those taking part in the research and those affected by the research. In a fluid environment such as a playroom or classroom where the case study children naturally engaged with their peers I was always alert to minimising risk for all children. The SERA (2005) guidance states that permission for observations is not always practical or necessary for all children, and therefore my permissions extended only to the case study children. As a researcher, ethics were of the upmost importance to me and while working with parents, teachers and children, I used my professional judgement to ensure that all ethical protocols were adhered to throughout the life of the study. Data gathered related uniquely to the study children.

Einarsdottir (2011a) stresses the importance of finding a mechanism that makes it clear to young children and understood by them, what the research is about and what the child might be expected to do. Gallagher (2009), writing about ethical considerations, suggests there are four core principles necessary for negotiating informed consent with children. These are,

obtaining explicit consent, understanding the nature and purpose of the research, ensuring consent is given voluntarily and that consent can be withdrawn at any point (2009: 16). Achieving these core principles with children can be challenging (Salamon, 2015). Informed by the literature, prior to the data collection period, I arranged a visit in each setting, as a visitor, watching the children as they played and interacted with each other during one nursery session. I was introduced by a practitioner to the children as a visitor. The children were informed they would see me in their playroom and that I was there to learn about what they did in nursery. I felt this was an important aspect of the study, gaining the children's trust and helping them understand that while I was not known to them, I was a 'friendly' face. It was important that they felt comfortable with my presence. Corsaro (2003) suggests children need skilful support to ensure they are confident enough to give their assent to being participants.

On arrival at Mistletoe Nursery for each observation visit, I met with the children to remind them of their involvement and to give them the opportunity to participate or withdraw. We talked about the various ways that they could signal their assent or dissent. The boys were not interested in any form of written agreement, as they just wanted to get on and play. The girls suggested name writing or ticking a box if you couldn't write your name. In the end, one boy suggested doing a 'high five' if you wanted to be observed and a 'thumbs down' if you did not. In Bluebell NC, children were less interested in discussing the matter and couldn't see the need for anything as their parents had agreed they could be observed. When I suggested the

'high five and thumbs down' approach, they liked the idea. I followed the arrangement later on, when I met with the children at the start of each of my visits to Mistletoe Nursery and to Bluebell NC.

Obtaining the children's assent to participate in P1 in August/September 2015, was conducted in a similar way. I met with them in their respective primary school classrooms just before the start of the school day. The thirteen children were now located in four different primary 1 classrooms across three primary schools. We had a brief catch-up discussion about who I was and why I was now visiting them in primary school. A few had forgotten who I was, but they were reminded by some of their peers that I had observed them playing when they were in nursery. Once again, all children were content to give verbal assent that I could be in their classroom and observe them during their lessons.

5.6   Confidentiality and anonymity

Cuskelly asserts that 'confidentiality is a hallmark of ethical research' (2005:103). The protection of the rights of children as competent research participants also requires the researcher to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Goredema-Braid, 2010). Throughout this thesis the identity of all participants has been anonymised, pseudonyms have been used in all the research documentation, including the names of the two local authorities involved and the nursery and primary schools. It was explained to participants through the use of information leaflets that were issued prior to the commencement of the study that any data gathered by the researcher

during interviews would be kept confidential and remain so, unless, during the data gathering activities children were at risk. This message was also repeated to the participants before each interview took place. All the data was anonymised at the point of transcription and safely stored on a password protected and encrypted laptop. Although there is a debate that proposes that people should be given credit for their involvement in research, (Salamon, 2015) I chose to anonymise the data because I felt it was important to ensure the participants felt comfortable to take part.

5.7 Data analysis

In previous sections of this chapter, I outlined the qualitative methodology and data collection methods used in this study. In the following sections, I justify why thematic analysis was selected as the tool for data analysis, then I describe in detail the process of coding the data.

5.7.1 Justifying the data analysis method

Miles and Huberman (1994:50) suggest that the analysis of data should begin very early on in a qualitative study. They argue every researcher will come to the 'fieldwork with some orienting ideas' of what they hope to find (1994:17). The challenge for the qualitative researcher then is to make sense of the data that can be amassed in even a small scale study (Miles *et al.*, 2014). Bryman offers some broad advice on the analysing of qualitative data. He suggests using some general strategies or frameworks which include approaches known as 'analytic induction' and some basic operations which include coding and 'narrative analysis' (2012: 565). Boeije (2010)

draws attention to the benefits of an inductive approach to the analysis of data, where for example, the researcher exploring a social phenomenon can surface patterns and themes which are embedded in the data and which can be interpreted to meaningfully reflect the social reality of the problem being studied. In qualitative research, making explicit the relationship between what is being researched and the data being analysed is important (Miles *et al.*, 2014). With this in mind, I therefore recognised it was important to select the data analysis approach that provided the best fit with the 'theoretical framework' and with the focus of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006:8). Similarly, I acknowledge the advice offered by Miles and Huberman (1994) that the reduction of data into credible conclusions requires the researcher to be rigorous and systematic in analysis.

In determining the most appropriate data analysis method, I felt it important then to be open to different approaches. Methods used by researchers in the field include the use of discourse analysis and narrative analysis. On closer investigation neither of these methods fitted with the aims or rationale of the study. I also considered but discounted the use of grounded theory, as I considered this data analysis method was not compatible with the theoretical framework of the study. I discounted 'grounded theory' on the basis that I was not attempting to generate theory, rather I was aiming to generate a valid, reliable and 'thick description' or account of the phenomena I was studying (Charmaz, 1995, 2017). It is fair to say that the coding process involved in grounded theory is arguably very similar to that of thematic analysis, but it goes further, adopting a spiral of data collection and the

constant comparison of data, working eventually to the formation of theory. The data for this study was collected over a short time period and so the study design did not include going back and forth to collect additional data.

From my exploration of the various tools at my disposal, I concluded that 'thematic analysis' was the most appropriate method for this study. Braun and Clarke (2006) insist there is a distinction between other data analysis methods and assert that despite views to the contrary, thematic analysis is not a tool, but a method in its own right. In the next section, I describe some key features of thematic analysis and I outline how I used thematic analysis to code the data corpus.

5.7.2 Thematic analysis

According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis, while commonly used, is 'a poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged data analysis method' (2006:4). It is considered by some to sit within other analytic traditions and therefore not a distinct analytical tool (Ryan and Barnard, 2000), although this view is disputed (Boyatzis, 1998). Where the convergence in thinking is around the flexibility it offers the researcher. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), advantages of using thematic analysis include ease of identifying patterns and themes and they argue that it can be applied credibly across a range of theoretical approaches 'what is important is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognise them *as* decisions' (Braun

and Clarke, 2006: 8). With this in mind, I concluded that the flexibility of the method and its simplicity of application were relevant attributes for this study.

Thematic analysis is used by researchers to break up or segment the data from several sources into pieces that can be sifted and searched for meaning and patterns before being reassembled into a series of codes, categories and themes (Boeije, 2010). As a researcher, I was intent on being responsive to the voices of the study participants and to use their thoughts, opinions, and behaviours to guide my thinking as I coded the data. I did not want to be constrained by a set of pre-determined codes and then to try and make the data fit a tight frame. I do have extensive knowledge and experience of early years education, so my worldview and grasp of related theory was bound to be a factor which influenced the analysis of the data. In order to counter this, I believed I had to find the right balance between an inductive and deductive approach.

Further, the ability to focus at one level which Braun and Clarke refer to as the 'semantic level' fitted with the inductive approach for determining themes and describing and interpreting the data (2006:13). Hence, I concluded that as a data analysis method, thematic analysis was relevant and would provide a logical and well-structured approach which incorporated explaining how I conducted my analysis, a step according to Attride-Stirling (2001) that is often omitted by qualitative researchers. Braun and Clarke (2006) offer a six stage model (Table 7) which I adapted to guide me through the process of

identifying codes, analysing and determining themes from the entire data corpus.

Phase	Stage	Description of the process
1	*Familiarisation with the data and assigning initial codes*	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	*Generating process codes Saldana, (2009)*	Coding interesting features of the data line by line in a systematic fashion using 'gerunds' across each of the data sets to create 'process codes'.
3	*Searching for patterns, categories and potential themes.*	Searching for patterns and collating codes into a smaller number of categories and considering potential themes. Creating a code guide with definitions to aid consistency across the data corpus.
4	*Distilling categories into themes*	Reviewing all data to distil categories into themes.
5	*Defining emerging themes*	On-going analysis across the data sets looking for coherence with the categories, key themes and theoretical framework-creating a 'thematic map'.
6	*Reporting findings*	The final opportunity for analysis, selecting vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts in relation to themes and relating back to research questions, literature and producing a report of the analysis.

Table 7-Stages of thematic analysis-adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

Researchers often use computer software such as Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) or NVivo. These software packages are frequently used for managing large volumes of data and aids the researcher in categorising, retrieving and counting frequency of events. However, I believe that the small scale nature of this study did not merit the amount of time it would require to input the data corpus. This is not to underestimate the significant amount of time that I used to transcribe and manually code the data from each of the data sets. Saldana (2009) stresses

the importance of getting a feel for your data and I concluded that the only way to gain a deep understanding of the data was to physically handle each data set. I accept that while there are well-documented benefits of using software packages as a data management tool which can swiftly retrieve data, it is widely known that software programmes cannot interpret findings.

5.7.3 The coding process-six phases

This section outlines the steps I took in completing the data analysis following Braun and Clarke's guide.

5.7.3.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation and initial coding

Miles and Huberman's (1994) view is that the researcher should become familiar with their data. The authors stress the importance of getting to grips early with the data and I did this in a systematic way. Following observation sessions, I found it helpful to read and re-read the field notes and observation schedules. After each semi-structured interview with parents and with practitioners and teachers, I listened to the audiotaped responses several times over and made some notes on commonalities and differences of responses. I personally undertook to transcribe the entire data corpus and not use a professional transcriber. This was a very time-consuming process that took much longer to complete than I anticipated, one that I realise now was an essential process in becoming familiar with the study data.

Miles and Huberman assert that 'coding is analysis' (1994: 56) and so the next step in the coding journey involved assigning an initial code to chunks of text of varying size in each of the four data sets. Reading and re-reading the

transcripts many times was required to identify previously unseen codes, similar phrases and differences in opinions (Boeije, 2010). A second round of reading added more initial codes to the lists. At this stage, the list was far too long and needed to be considered for any obvious overlap and repeating patterns.

5.7.3.2   Phase 2: Generating process codes

The second phase of activity involved line by line coding. A process code, or 'gerund' was manually assigned to a key word(s), phrase(s), a sentence(s) and or paragraph. (Appendix 13). Figure 4 shows that line by line coding of the data to generate process codes (Phase 2) followed the familiarisation with the data and initial coding activity-Phase I.
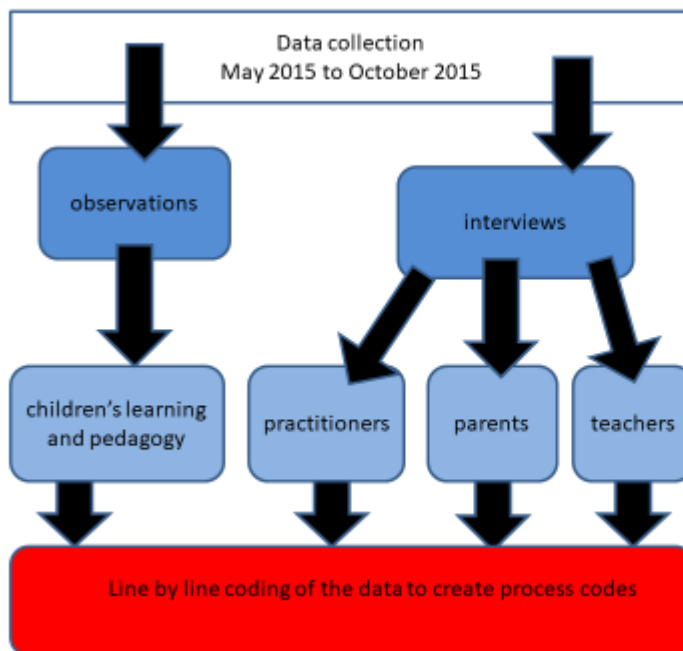
Figure 4-Generating process codes

Sometimes a process code was assigned to a response that had a direct link to the wording of the semi-structured interview questions themselves and was entirely relevant in terms of the research questions and theoretical framework. For example, for *'Code 14-supporting learning'*, I was searching for concrete examples of parents' actions to support their children's learning:

> *They [practitioners] stressed to us about the reading side of things and if they have a good focus on reading then that is sort of the basics of more or less any subject in school.* ==*So just talking to them*== *[child] and* ==*explaining*== *things and not using basic examples* ==*using more interesting examples*==*. For example not the basic one plus one equals two.*
>
> *(Lydia-parent, Mistletoe EYC)*

At other times, the assigned process code was strongly associated with the children's agency, their autonomy to choose activities, for example, Code 12 'exercising agency' (Appendix 14) is illustrated in the following extract:

Process Code-==12 exercising agency==

John, Kenny and Nadine (EYP) were soon working together building, using Lego. The two children were engrossed in their activity

==The children created a bin lorry==

John is now ==making a weapon from Lego== and claims he is Darth Vader, the baddy.

Lily is ==sitting at a table with small world toys,== she collaborates with a friend ==then after a short time wanders off outside==.

Lewis is hand washing before his snack, he and Kenny are obviously firm friends, ==they follow each other from place to place stopping to==

engage with a known adult helper. They serve themselves snack and
sit and chat, staff member inviting them to share their chat with her.
They don't hang about and are soon off outside.

5.7.3.3   Phase 3: Searching for patterns, categories and potential themes

At this time I also began to record my thoughts in a series of memos, in a research journal which captured my innermost thoughts and reflections on the data I had gathered. These reflections helped me clarify my thinking during the data analysis process (Appendix 15). Saldana (2009), asserts that memo writing is data analysis. Further, he suggests memos are a way of reflecting on the coding choices that emerge from the data corpus. Memo writing should happen concurrently with coding and should be suggestive rather than conclusive (Saldana, 2009: 33). In addition, I created a coding guide to aid consistency of approach to coding and to improve validity and bring reliability to the data analysis process (Appendix 16). During Phase 3, I began searching for patterns, categories and potential themes. I was looking to compare and contrast the data sets identifying relationships between the initial codes and process codes and making any obvious connections to the research questions. Figure 5 below shows that the process of identifying categories followed Phase 2-line by line coding of the data which generated a set of process codes.
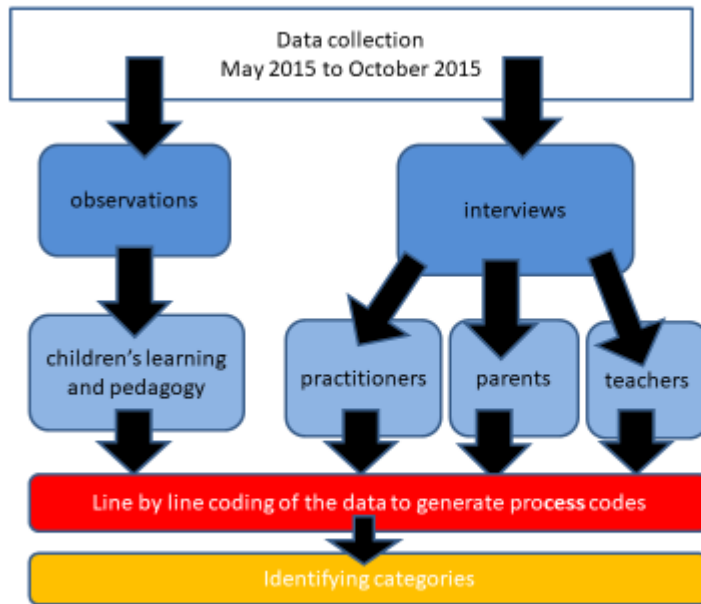
Figure 5-Identifying categories from process codes

During Phase 3 a number of categories started to emerge. Figure 6 below

shows that ultimately five categories were considered relevant.
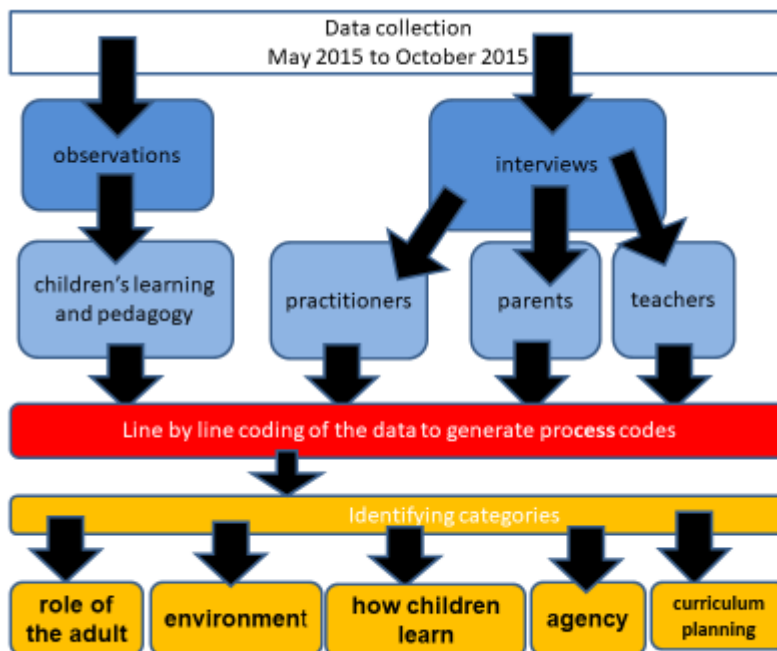
Figure 6-Five potential categories emerging from data analysis

5.7.3.4   Phase 4: Distilling categories into themes

In qualitative data analysis, Miles and Huberman (1994) outline a set of analytic moves that the researcher conducts. These moves include affixing codes, noting relationships and patterns between variables and eventually reducing the number of generalisations that inform analysis and may lead to creation of constructs or theory.

In this fourth phase, I aimed to draw out a small number of themes from the categories. In order to do this, I returned to the process codes and used colour coding to ensure a 'best fit' under each of the categories. This back and forth activity of segmenting, unravelling or fragmenting data is a necessary part of the data analysis process (Boeije, 2010).

Some codes had similar definitions and it was clear they represented similar aspects. For example, '*recognising achievement'* was similar to '*sharing success'* and '*supporting learning'* was similar to '*meeting children's needs'*. Boeije (2010) asserts that reassembling the 'building blocks' is part of the analysis. The author also stresses the need for these building blocks to be clear. By condensing the repeating and overlapping codes five categories emerged: *role of the adult, planning and delivering the curriculum, how children learn, children's agency and child's environment*, this reassembly process brought clarity to the relationship between the process codes and the categories. This exercise confirmed the relevance of the categories and also revealed a strong correlation between the emerging themes and the under-pinning theoretical framework. Figure 7 shows the journey from data

collection to data analysis: generating process codes, identifying categories and then the emergence of a small number of relevant themes.
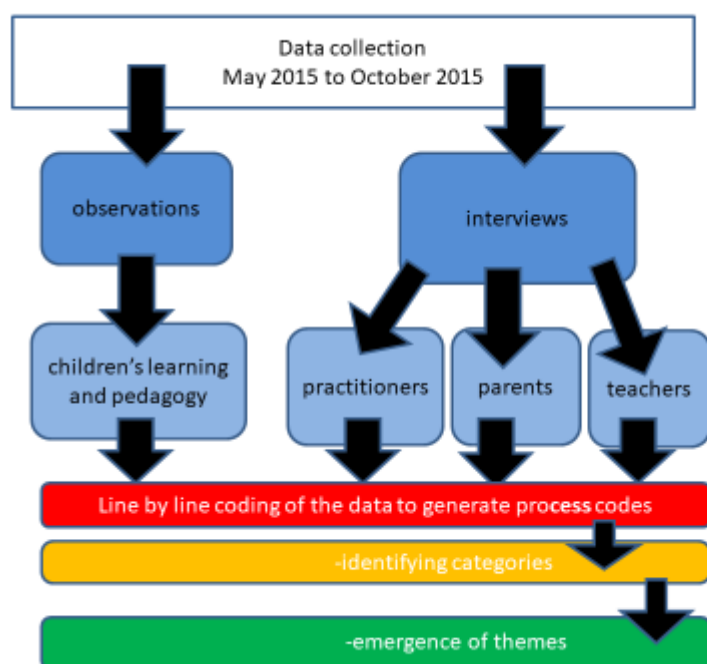
Figure 7-Data analysis journey-the emergence of themes from categories

5.7.3.5 Phase 5: Defining themes

During this fifth coding phase, I revisited all of the data and challenged earlier decisions I had made around process codes, potential categories and themes. As a result of taking a closer look across the coded data sets I determined a small number of themes. Three key themes emerged:

Theme 1 *Planning and delivering the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence*

Theme 2 *Supporting children's transition across the 'early level'*

Theme 3 *Moving between two traditions-implications for how children learn, their agency and social capital.*

This phase further confirmed and strengthened the connection to the theoretical framework and research questions. The significance of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998) as the central tenant of the theoretical framework strongly connected with themes one and two. The third theme highlighted the importance of the permeating and interconnecting elements of Bourdieu's (1983) sociological theory, reinforcing the appropriateness of this blended framework-bioecological theory and sociocultural theory. Figure 8 illustrates in more detail, the journey from data collection through each phase of the thematic analysis process. The bi-directional arrows show the back and forth activity which took place between each of the phases and that there were clear links with the theoretical framework.
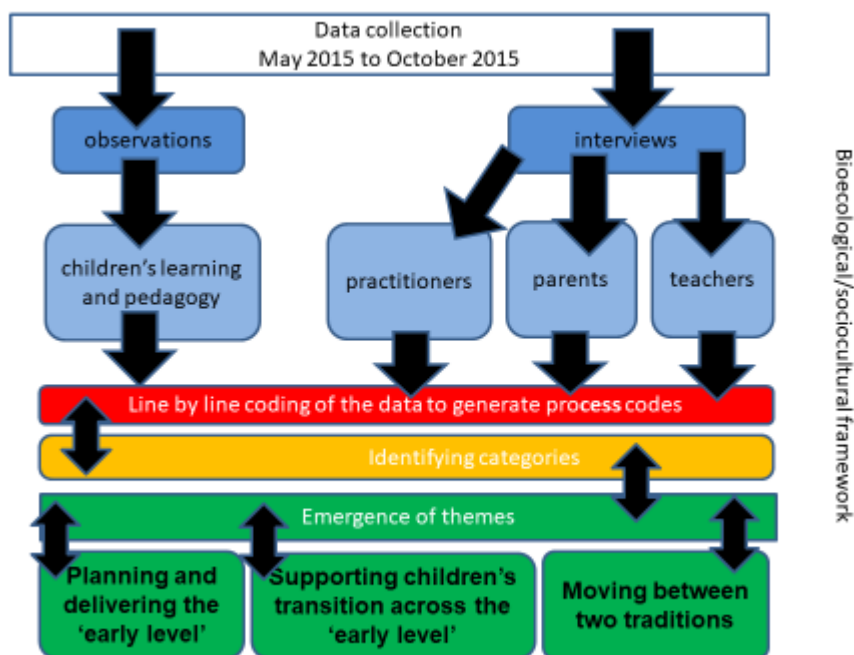
Figure 8-Phase 5-defining key themes

5.7.3.6 Phase 6: Reporting findings

Phase 6 of the model is about reporting findings. In Chapters 6 and 7, the main findings will be reported in relation to the three research questions and with the key themes which emerged during Phase 5 of the thematic analysis process. However, for completeness in describing the thematic analysis process, I have outlined the purpose of the sixth phase in this section. Braun and Clarke suggest this final phase offers the researcher 'the final opportunity for analysis, selecting vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts in relation to themes and relating back to research questions, literature and then producing a report of the analysis' (2006: 35).

5.8 Trustworthiness of data

When assessing the quality of quantitative research Braun and Clarke (2013) assert that 'good research is reliable and valid' (2013:278). However, they suggest that this criterion is not an appropriate criterion for qualitative research and that there are no absolute criteria for judging qualitative research. There is however an expectation that the qualitative researcher will ensure that her research is 'trustworthy' (Bryman, 2012) and 'authentic' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Authors on the subject of reliability contend that the instruments being used require to generate credible data, and that data does what they say they are going to do (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Greg, *et al.*, 2007; Bryman, 2012).

Further that the data gathering instruments 'find a fit between what is recorded as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011:202). In relation to this study, I believe that the observations, interviews with practitioners, teachers and parents and discussions with children added what Bryman (2012) refers to as 'trustworthiness' to the data gathered. Furthermore, I was not seeking in this study to generalise or to replicate the findings, an outcome of qualitative research that according to Cohen *et al.* (2011) is a strength rather than a weakness. This was an exploratory study where it was expected that there would be multiple perspectives on the research problem of the social reality of ensuring curriculum continuity. It was therefore important to devise a study and theoretical framework that underpinned this world view (Bryman, 2012). Similarly, it was important to strive for authenticity in the data, whilst acknowledging there are no absolute truths in the social world (Bryman, 2012:390)

To increase the reliability of the data, quality criteria and techniques have been devised (Braun and Clarke, 2013). I used the 'inter-rater' approach as a means of establishing a strong agreement with the coding process. A sample of the data was coded by an independent assessor, the outcome of this produced an 85% correlation signalling a high level of agreement. As this study is presented from my interpretation of the participants' perspectives I did not involve participants in 'respondent validation' activities (Bryman, 2012: 391). By adopting these techniques and that of triangulation; using more than one method or source of data I am confident I have accurately

reflected the participants' views and in analysing the transcript, I minimised researcher bias, whilst 'maximising the benefits of engaging actively with the participants in the study' (Yardley, 2008:237).

5.9   Chapter summary

In this chapter, I discussed the design of the research, the data collection methods and the data analysis process. The chapter also presented the ethical issues, how I considered these in relation to this research project and a reflection of my ontological position. The use of a six stage thematic analysis process has highlighted the connections between the research questions and the underpinning theoretical framework. Furthermore, the thematic analysis process has revealed three key themes which were deduced from the data. The next two chapters will present the main findings in relationship to the three research questions and themes.

Chapter 6: Findings 1: identifying two traditions

Introduction

This chapter is the first of two data chapters. In Chapter 5, I justified the use of a case study approach and described how following the early analysis of the data the need for two cases emerged: case 1, the 'nursery early level' and case 2, the 'P1 early level'.

Over the next two chapters, each case is commented on in direct relationship to the research questions, literature related to the research problem and the key themes which were revealed during the thematic analysis of the data. Research question 1 is dealt with in this chapter and research questions 2 and 3 are covered in Chapter 7.

> **Research question 1**: *How do practitioners and teachers in two Scottish nursery settings and three associated primary school ensure curriculum continuity across the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level? (Theme 1)*

In each chapter, findings from the 'nursery early level' case are reported on first, followed by findings from the 'P1 early level' case. I then draw comparisons between the two cases before summarising the findings as they relate to each of the research questions. Data extracts have been selected to provide authenticity to the perspectives of the practitioners, teachers, and parents, and, at the same time, to add validity to the discussion.

In this chapter, I will argue that the approaches used to plan and deliver the 'early level' curriculum vary and therefore influence how well curriculum continuity and progression in children's learning is achieved. I will also touch on how practitioners and teachers in this study involve children and parents in curriculum planning processes.

6.1 The 'nursery early level' case

This section will illustrate how practitioners plan the 'early level' curriculum experiences and learning outcomes and how they involve parents in the transition to school process. It will report how practitioners mainly work and plan curriculum activities together in a team within a nursery playroom, interacting with each other and with children throughout the day.

6.1.1 Planning the 'early level' curriculum-the role of the practitioner

In the two nursery settings, almost all of the ten practitioners interviewed, described a collegiate approach to planning the 'early level' curriculum in their nursery setting. Lorna and Hannah both described just such a collegiate approach:

> *At the beginning of term, we look at our long term plan and then it is broken down into medium term plans and each member of staff is involved in setting the plan out and looking at where we want to go. (Lorna-practitioner, Mistletoe Nursery Class).*

> *We have planning meetings and the staff bring together children's interests and we discuss how we are going to take that planning*

forward. We select the learning outcomes from Curriculum for

Excellence that is going to suit the interests that the children have and

which ones we feel we would be able to cover and also staff can add

outcomes at any point. (Hannah-SEYP, Bluebell Nursery)

Hannah reinforced the strong focus on sharing information with members of the practitioner team, she emphasised the need to discuss how the child's learning will be taken forward. This is characteristic of a reflexive approach to planning the curriculum activities a child might need to experience, to deepen learning, or learn new skills (Moyles, 2010). In Hannah's comments, the child's needs were placed alongside the expectation that the 'early level' experiences and outcomes will guide the planning process.

A child-centred approach to planning was also exemplified in Megan's commentary. She referred to how her team used their knowledge of the children as individuals to plan curriculum content in the long, medium and short term. Her 'cycle of curriculum planning' also included children in the planning process, their views and opinions were sought as part of the process (Einarsdottir, 2011b).

We have planning sheets, we will ask them initially what they would

like to learn if they are going to do a certain type of activity what would

they learn from doing that. It is about getting the children to have a bit

more in depth thought. If they are learning to cycle a bike then at the

end, you evaluate 'did you learn to cycle' and now the children are

aware of doing this, they are really good at doing this now. When

doing the activity with them when you go to assess them on the back of the form with the observation sheet 'did they achieve it' and show how successful they have been using photographic evidence. You would then bring that sheet to the team meeting and have a chat about what worked well. Children's profiles show their progress which parents can also see and I take to the team meetings. This is part of their profile book and they have different sections such as my activities, literacy, numeracy and health and well-being, special achievements and favourite items so it is all categorised. This will also include their own thoughts about their learning. This shows teachers and parents what progress they have made and what they have been able to do.

(Megan-practitioner, Mistletoe Nursery)

Megan mentioned communicating with parents and teachers as part of the planning cycle and how they were kept informed through reporting systems. The focus on collaboration and communication with stakeholders to inform future plans was a recurring feature of practice in the two nursery settings. By including parents and children in the planning, opportunities for partnership working were seized by practitioners. The above example, in agreement with Dunlop (2016), shows that engagement in this way with children and parents is considered a positive approach to curriculum planning. Megan justified the importance of involving both children and parents in the planning processes.

Talking about curriculum continuity, Joan, another practitioner, described how she achieves this by working across the two 'early level' traditions with the teachers in Mistletoe Primary School, to plan a series of events involving children and their families in familiarisation activities in the school. Joan is convincing in her argument of the benefits of working closely with her colleagues. She explained how these priming activities provided children with an opportunity to become accustomed to their new surroundings.

> *Throughout the year we work closely with the school and they come and visit us and are involved in all the things that we do. The buddies, spring concerts, Christmas concerts, they invite us to nativity plays. We do loads together throughout the year, we went along with school to do planting, we were involved in the P1 active play. They were making up stations and activities and our children went to join them. We shared a lot of the floorbooks together with the P1s.*
>
> *(Joan-practitioner, Mistletoe Nursery)*

Bronfenbrenner (1979) promotes a socialisation approach for the child making an ecological transition. He asserts, the adjustment to a new microsystem outside the family can be problematic for the child and so the activities described by Joan helped the child become familiar with their new environment.

The collaborative approach to 'early level' curriculum planning was similarly noted by Nadine. She highlighted the partnership which exists between Mistletoe Nursery and Mistletoe PS.

The joint planning was because our [planning] cycles were so established and how we used them, we shared them with P1-P3 teachers using a presentation and we worked closely with one of the P1 teachers. (Nadine-practitioner, Mistletoe Nursery)

What was illuminating in her choice of words, was the strength of belief in the practice within her nursery team, that they have been working together for a while '*our planning cycles are so established'*. She implied that they had something of worth to share with the teachers. It could be concluded that a meeting of minds and a sharing of practice offers the potential for further partnership working and for creating a unified approach to planning the 'early level' (Moss, 2013).

6.1.2 Practitioners involving parents in the transition to school arrangements

Practitioners in both nursery settings had well established systems in place for involving parents throughout the transition process, in a programme of events which included regular informal face to face meetings, information sessions, workshops and jointly organised events with teachers in the associated school. When practitioners were asked how they engaged with parents during the transition period, Megan described a supportive, responsive culture, where the practitioners were on hand to share information. From her comments, I deduced that parents received the information in a non-threatening way, in an ethos where parents were encouraged to question, to raise concerns, to share anxieties and where parents interacted with the practitioners themselves:

There is an interactive curriculum evening and the rooms are set out with the regular things that they [children] *would be involved with. The parents get to have a look at the type of resources and different levels of development of their children. We try to do the visit to the school on the same night so that they can see the transition from nursery to P1. They could see a type of activity and skills they* [children] *would use and by the time they are in P1 the next step/level that they* [children] *would then be at or working toward.*

(*Megan-practitioner, Mistletoe Nursery*)

Joan's comments endorsed Megan's view of how they involved parents in learning about the 'early level' curriculum in P1.

We do an open evening where a teacher is there if any parents want to ask any questions and in their pre-school year often we get parents wanting to know if there is things they should know or need to do. We have an informal night coming up for the parents where we will start with a range of activities that the children experience on a day-to-day basis and then they will go from there to P1 to see the progression.

(Joan-practitioner, Mistletoe Nursery)

Conversely, the approaches adopted by Bluebell NC as illustrated below in Hannah's explanation, suggests a more didactic, formal approach to imparting information rather than an equal partnership where interaction flows between the participants. The use of words implies a hierarchy where practitioners *give* and parents *get* or *receive* information:

They [parents] get written feedback in terms on the report. We have
verbal communication with them as well. We have run workshops so
that the parents know what to expect with their child going to school.
(Hannah-SEYP, Bluebell Nursery Class).

In a further comment from Hannah '*we run workshops so parents know what to expect*' suggests that parents are expected to follow the advice given. When parents were viewed as receivers of information, it could be interpreted that there was an unequal partnership, adopting a top down approach locates parents within a process where they were viewed as players who needed to know the rules, where potentially they had no influence over shaping them.

They get information so that they know what the expectations are
when their child goes to school. The nursery teacher and also school
teachers are involved in these different workshops.
(Hannah-SEYP, Bluebell Nursery Class)

Collaborative planning was an approach utilised by practitioner teams in both nursery settings. Practitioners planned the 'early level' together, using the child's motivations and interests as the stimulus for their discussions to guide the content of the 'early level' activities on offer to children. Children were included in these discussions, their ideas for curriculum content influenced practitioners' plans. However, there was divergence in how practitioners involved parents, as evidenced in their interactions and relationships. Bluebell NC's formal approaches for engaging with parents in priming events

seemed at odds with those promoted by Mistletoe Nursery which reflected a culture of reciprocal partnerships.

6.2   The 'P1 early level' case

This section will show that the ways in which teachers plan the 'early level' differ from the approaches used by the practitioners in the two nursery settings, suggesting teachers adopt a predominantly autonomous system, where children had little say in what they learned. Similarly, that parents, while part of the transition to school programmes appear to be recipients of information rather than being considered as equal partners in the process.

6.2.1 Planning the 'early level' curriculum-the role of the P1 teacher

In the interviews with three of the four teachers, it emerged that planning the 'early level' was left largely to the individual teacher or her stage partner 'working alone' (Karilia and Rantavuori, 2014:382).   Some collaborative planning across the traditions with practitioners did occur, as exemplified in Laura's comments.   In essence, she perceived her role was to determine curriculum content.

> *Within my class it is up to me what I want to do with the curriculum. I know that in nursery they have been following the early level planner and they then send that information over to us then we have a meeting with the nursery teacher about what they need work on and if there any issues and also discuss what has been covered but basically making sure the early level curriculum is met.*
> *(Laura-teacher, Bluebell PS)*

Laura described an awareness of the practice in the nursery as far as planning was concerned, though the information she received from the nursery about children's progress was something that was '*sent over*'. She did highlight the need to identify what the child can do, but a stronger message emerged where the emphasis by the teachers was on 'achieving' the early level. There was a sense that meeting externally imposed goals and targets were driving her plans. The reference to meeting with practitioners implied that planning occurred across sectors, highlighting the existence of collaboration. This collaborative relationship between practitioners and teachers was not strongly demonstrated during observations of practice.

Similarly, my impression was that in terms of planning the 'early level' in P1, the teacher was responsible for planning the content and nature of learning activities with limited collaboration with other teachers at the same stage. Here, Laura's account reinforces this impression:

> *You decide within your class what to do as you know what level they are at. At the beginning, we do whole class activities and then not long after you can see the differences of who can be challenged and which ones need support. The good thing about having the different start to the year was being able to have three groups within a class and being able to put them into groups of who needed support and who didn't. This has made the classes more evenly spread.*
> *(Laura-teacher, Bluebell PS)*

In the example below, Holly's approaches contrasted greatly with Laura's 'working alone' approach to planning. Holly on the other hand, depicted a team approach which was more responsive to children's needs and stages of development. From her commentary, she regularly planned together with her P1 stage partner:

> *It is very collegiate. Myself and my stage partner (name) work closely together, almost on a daily basis, to discuss where we are going to go, to discuss formative assessment for the children….we plan on a weekly basis for our numeracy, mathematics and literacy activities and general professional dialogue at the end of each day to discuss any adaptations that need to be made.*
> (*Holly-teacher, Mistletoe PS)*

Another feature, in relation to planning the 'early level' in P1 was highlighted by Laura, though perhaps not consciously. Laura acknowledged the existence of differences between the 'early level' in nursery and in P1:

> *This year, I have P1 which is completely different with a different curriculum and back to the early level and with big changes this year in terms of how they set up the classrooms.*
> *(Laura-teacher, Bluebell PS)*

Laura perceived the 'P1 early level' curriculum was different, though her interpretation of the variance seemed to be directed at the physical environment. She pointed out that changes to the layout of the classrooms

had been made, to facilitate more play. I was made aware of this development by the school, who wanted to create a less formal learning environment, that offered children more opportunities to learn through play.

Being aware of these structural differences may be useful in terms of promoting cross-sectoral dialogue, especially during the planning stages of transition programmes (Moss, 2013). Margetts, describes how effective transition programmes 'should include strategies that attempt to retain the benefits of pre-school programmes' (2002:115). Further, when transition programmes are carefully considered and collaboratively planned 'the unfamiliar will become familiar, continuity of experiences will be facilitated and the child will feel more secure in their new environment, schools will utilise valuable knowledge of children's prior experiences' (Margetts, 2002:122). In this regard, embracing the inconsistencies between the sectors by planning for continuity could be a unifying step.

Laura highlights below another planning related feature, when she talks about the importance of planning for children's emotional wellbeing and the need for the child to feel comfortable in their new environment (Morrow, 1999). Further, she saw this as her responsibility, her 'job' to take care of the children. She placed a strong focus on enjoyment and flexibility in the curriculum, alongside the importance of providing children with opportunities to have some ownership of their learning, for them to want to take part in learning activities:

My job is to make sure the P1s were settled as they came in and trying to make it fun, the element of not just sitting down, making it fun and engaging them and so they are keen to learn and do other things.

(Laura-teacher, Bluebell PS)

Laura's perspective exemplified the findings of other studies, of teachers' concern for easing a child's passage into a new environment. She takes on the responsibility of helping the children adjust to new ways of being. As Broström (2002b) suggests the teacher needs to take into account the child's perspectives and the teacher's role is to help the child feel settled and secure in not just the ecological environment but also the sociocultural environment.

Another P1 teacher, Mandy, was aware that formative and summative assessments influenced the content of teachers' curriculum plans. The use of assessment in planning the 'early level' featured in the commentary from teachers, but were not mentioned in the practitioners' comments. Mandy provided a justification for using assessment information to inform her planning.

Riverside Council has a literacy and numeracy baseline so we use that to aid our planning so that comes from our nursery partners. We have three or four feeders this year. We are doing an assessment and moderation across the authority and we are working closely with the early years teacher.

(Mandy-teacher, Mistletoe PS)

All schools in Riverside Council used a formal assessment tool to determine the child's level of ability in literacy and numeracy. The assessment information was shared and used to plan the content of the 'early level' curriculum in P1 Mandy described how she built on the baseline assessment information gathered at the start of the P1 year to drive the pace of learning during the course of the child's first year at school. There were targets to meet. I was aware that teachers faced external pressures to ensure almost all children in their class attained the 'early level' by the time they left P1. Critically, this pressure to evidence children's levels of attainment conflicts with Curriculum for Excellence philosophy which advocates for a socially responsive child-centred curriculum. Such a contested position highlights the more structured planning arrangements that I noted within the 'P1 early level' case data.

Teachers in the three primary schools received transition reports from the practitioners in advance of the child starting school after the summer break. The norm in Scotland is that transition reports are shared with parents and the receiving primary school in the final few weeks of the summer term. Transition reports were mentioned by Mandy, she commented on inconsistencies in the transition information she received from the practitioners. The written reports she received offered a professional judgement of the child's progress in key aspects of their learning and of their wider achievements. Reports were meant to inform parents but also to influence planning 'early level' curriculum content. Mandy perceived that

some of the nursery practitioners' evaluation of the child's progress did not match up with her professional judgement.

> *There was a slight disconnect with professional judgement, some staff in the nursery said secure in 1 to 5 but it's not what we would consider secure. I think in the future it would be helpful to have more collegiate working together in order to share a standard. So that if they say something then we know that it is because that was slightly difficult when looking at transition notes and making an idea in your head where that child was. For example if they said a child was a 5 but I actually thought they were a 10, a more sharing of standard and shared dialogue on what certain things and what they would show up as in the child's ability. (Mandy, teacher, Mistletoe PS)*

Mandy's questioning of professional judgement and assessment information underlines a potential barrier to achieving curriculum continuity. Any disparity in terms of valuing and trusting each other's professional judgements, either orally or written, about what children can do, what they know, and how well they can apply their skills needs to be resolved if institutional barriers between the ELC sector and P1 are to be broken down.

In Mandy's comments above, her questioning of the practitioner's assessment was balanced by the recognition that more collegiate working was needed, thereby creating the potential for a better understanding of the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level. She suggested that sharing the standard between practitioners and teachers would have an impact on how

they plan the content of the 'early level' curriculum. She implies that by having a clear and shared understanding of the standard, curriculum plans would be more developmentally appropriate and potentially help improve continuity and children's learning experiences.

In Mandy's view, regular dialogue with nursery colleagues could improve the quality and robustness of the information passed to her from practitioners. The depth of the child's knowledge, skills and understanding of a concept is important for planning a continuous curriculum experience from nursery to primary school.

One other area that was explored in the interviews with the teachers, was how they involved parents in the transition process. Teachers were asked specifically what contact they had with parents as part of supporting the child's transition to school. Holly (P1 teacher) explained the arrangements in Mistletoe PS.

> *At the start of the year, we have a curriculum workshop which is literacy and numeracy based just to show the parents what we are doing in the classroom and how they can support them (their child). (Holly-teacher, Mistletoe PS)*

Holly's account implied parents were given guidance on how to support their child at home, but my impression was that there were rules to be followed.

In this next example, Laura's description of what happens at the 'meet the teacher' event further endorsed the existence of a didactic rules based

approach '*telling them [parents] about learning*' when sharing information about school with parents. Laura talked about '*running*' through the methods used to teach curriculum subjects, suggesting there was limited space for two way dialogue, to ask questions or seek clarification.

> *We did a meet the teacher night at the beginning and we gave them a run through what happens in a school day and in lessons. We also had one within the school day and that was telling them about learning and about language, maths and why we teach it and what we do with them. We have parent helpers that come in and some of them are the P1 that help with computers and painting. We have parents night coming up soon too. There is a Facebook page but that is the PTA that has access to that. There are emails with newsletters and the school website.*
> *(Laura-teacher, Bluebell PS)*

As the child's first educator, it is widely acknowledged that parents have a role to play in supporting their child throughout their educational journey (Shields, 2009). In this study, practitioners and teachers included parents in the starting school transition arrangements. From my observations practitioners' and teachers' engagement with parents during this transition period suggested on the one hand a partnership approach, '*a working with*' philosophy, but on balance I found in reality it was more of '*a doing to*' approach. The building of relationships and trust between the parents and the nursery or school are essential elements of early childhood education

(Dockett and Perry, 2004, 2007a). However, I concluded that in both cases, there were variations in the ways in which relationships were established during transition to school programmes. Overall, I found that the three primary schools offered workshops and presentations to parents where the teachers' emphasis was on imparting information about structures, routines and expectations rather than working in a socially constructed partnership where all participants had an equal voice.

In this section, I have shown that in planning the 'early level' curriculum, teachers in this study were influenced by internal and external pressures. These included meeting attainment targets that were set for children and the expectation that assessment data were used to inform the content of the 'early level' curriculum in P1. I have shown that while collaboration between the P1 teachers existed, it was not a dominant feature of their planning approaches. In addition, I identified some key sectoral differences with regard to involving and sharing curriculum information with parents at the point of transition. Practitioners in the two nursery settings, used a largely informal approach, compared with formal, instructional approaches, which were indicative of the structured nature of the primary school environment.

6.3   Summarising planning in the two 'early level' cases

I have demonstrated that in planning the 'early level' curriculum two different traditions existed. Practitioners employed a collaborative approach to planning the 'early level' and their 'early level' curriculum plans were largely informed by children's interests and complemented by formative assessment

information. By comparison, curriculum planning approaches used by teachers in P1 occurred in isolation or with a stage partner. The content of teachers' 'early level' curriculum plans were influenced by the data from formative and summative assessments. Practitioners and teachers shared transition information and they used 'bridging topics or themes' and priming activities that involved parents and their child in order to ease the transition to school.

The P1 teachers' 'early level' plans were influenced by a range of assessments, which included data from standardised assessments. In P1, it appeared that assessment data was driving the content of the curriculum and learning activities. Similarly, external pressures were evident in the P1 case, as teachers were increasingly expected to demonstrate progress in learning against a set of national attainment targets.

In Scotland, it is expected that almost all children aged 3 to 6 will achieve the 'early level' by the end of P1. In determining progress towards achieving a level, a range of formative assessment activity takes place in both the early learning and childcare sector and in primary schools. Formative assessment which includes practitioners' professional judgement in determining a child's progress at the 'early level' reflects pedagogical practice in early learning and childcare settings. In contrast, assessment activity in the primary school sector combined both formative and summative approaches. In addition, 'professional judgement' forms part of the suite of 'assessment' tools used by practitioners and teachers to inform their planning, determining what will be

taught, when and in identifying which children will be the focus of specific curriculum activities (Fisher, 2013).

In concluding this section, I have demonstrated that the approaches used by practitioners and teachers to plan the 'early level' curriculum vary. Likewise, the systems for engaging with parents during the transition to school process. As I will discuss in Chapter 8, a more collaborative approach to determining 'early level' curriculum content and subsequent learning activities might emerge from greater collegiate working between the two sectors.

6.4 The 'nursery early level' case and 'primary early level' case-differences in pedagogy and teaching approaches

In this section, I will demonstrate that practitioners' pedagogy was more responsive to a child's spontaneous interest in themes and topics and to the motivations that unfold in their lives. By comparison teachers, adopted teaching approaches that were mainly influenced by the institutional norms of following the school timetable. Lessons delivered by the three P1 teachers, were mainly associated with the teaching of pre-determined bundles of experiences and outcomes for each of the eight Curriculum for Excellence subject areas.

6.4.1 Responsive child-centred pedagogy

This section reports the pedagogical approaches used by the seven practitioners and three senior staff in the two nursery settings (Mistletoe Nursery and Bluebell NC). Extracts from playroom observations and interviews are used to illustrate the pedagogical practices adopted by the

practitioners when supporting and extending learning or leading learning episodes or planned activities.

Pedagogical approaches used by practitioners and teachers to deliver the 'early level' were polarised. This raises some questions about the institutional nuances which exist between the two sectors of education. In the example below, Lily, Belle, Lewis and Walter were engaged in free play, exploring, investigating and being energetic using a variety of resources. Jill (Team leader) provided support to the boys who were having a go at balancing on the plant pots. Her timely intervention supported and at the same time extended their learning.

> Lily is working with John in the construction area
>
> Belle on a wheeled bus- exclaiming she is the leader
>
> Lewis and Walter are walking on plastic pots-they do this skilfully
>
> balancing and using the rope handles to move about up and down
>
> the set of stairs. Jill (Team leader) offers a bit of support pointing out
>
> the need to take care and asking what might happen if they
>
> lose balance. Walter in solitary play using his Lego gun, joined then by
>
> two others they run and chase each other. Jill (Team leader) sets the
>
> scene for finding the big bad wolf. She retells the story of the three
>
> little pigs and children become the characters.
>
> John joins in the acting out of the story of the three little pigs which Jill
>
> leads using a range of props and children being the main characters.
>
> (*Jill-team leader and Lily, John, Belle, Lewis and Walter-Mistletoe*

Nursery-Fieldwork notes, 1ˢᵗ June 2015).

The children were able to continue to follow their own interests while receiving from Jill appropriate interventions to scaffold their learning. Jill had not formally planned her input, rather she was responsive to their needs. Fisher (2013) writes that this type of learning is 'child-initiated'. There was no attempt by Jill to influence their play, just a timely reminder about being careful. Jill then set up an opportunity for some role play, an 'adult-initiated' opportunity. However, there was no expectation that children would leave their balancing activity to join her. Children who did respond, did so because they wanted to, while others persevered with their chosen activity.

In this next data extract, I observed Jill engaged in responsive pedagogy. As the supporting adult, she did just enough to promote children's curiosity.

> Jill is supporting a numeracy activity. Chalk lines are drawn freely and compared with the length of the dinosaur found in the soil. Kathleen enjoys this activity and is keen to work with Jill who supports her to talk about what she knows about real dinosaurs. (*Jill-team leader and Kathleen-Mistletoe Nursery-Fieldwork notes, 1ˢᵗ June 2015).*

Jill enhanced Kathleen's knowledge about dinosaurs, building on her interest in the creatures. Her input was supportive and enabling. My impression of interacting in this way is important, because I perceived that it helped Jill build up a picture of Kathleen's abilities in early number, which in turn, had the potential to influence Jill's future curriculum plans. Broström (2016)

asserts that play and learning are not supposed to be identical, they are different but both result in children acquiring new skills and knowledge as well as developing psychologically. An important characteristic of such development is 'learning through social interaction and communication' (Broström, 2016:32).

At Mistletoe Nursery, children were also timetabled to attend a weekly session in the school gym hall. During the lesson described below, the children were taught by William, a visiting sports coach. Children were also supported during the lesson by the practitioners from their playroom.

> Before they take part in the gym session the (sports coach) William
> asks them 'do we run in the same direction round the gym?'
> 'do we hold hands when we are running?'
> 'do we stand on the lines?'
> The children all chorus 'no'. Throughout the session almost all of the
> children engage energetically with the activities. One child has
> difficulty following the instructions and is reminded to 'pay attention'.
> The games are focused on colour recognition and this same child fails
> to stand beside the correct cone. He is supported by staff. The study
> group children all show they know their colours. Kathleen is
> particularly sharp at stopping and finding a partner then standing
> beside the designated cone. They work in pairs for a bit to stand by a
> cone when the whistle blows then on their own to find a coloured
> cone. The coach then starts to remove the number of cones so that

children are 'out' if they don't find a cone to stand beside.

(*William, sports coach-and nine study children-Mistletoe Nursery-Fieldwork notes, 20th May 2015*).

I perceived that the teaching style adopted by the sports coach was very different to the pedagogical practice employed in the nursery setting, imparting information and giving instruction featured regularly throughout the lesson. Searching questions were asked, to gauge the level of children's recall from a previous lesson. Very specific ball handling and movement skills were being taught and, the children responded positively to the style of teaching used by William. This example, also illustrated how children had to make sense of the rules of the game, the parameters of social behaviour which were clearly defined by William. The children respected and seemed comfortable with conforming to the norms in the gym hall. Not once did they challenge the style of teaching, they appeared to have the resources at their disposal to adjust to the changes in pedagogy, as they moved between the familiar rhythms of the playroom and the gymnasium.

In another physical education lesson, which practitioners Mary and Jean had planned, children seemed to enjoy the adult-directed learning activity. The lesson was planned around one of the 'early level' curriculum physical education experiences. Cara, one of the children in my target group, and the other children joined in the warm up session and in the games that were clearly designed to raise their heart beat and to get them playing

cooperatively. This was achieved through a series of chase and catch games.

Children are excited about being in the gym, they chatter to each other as they find a space on the painted line. Mary and Jean recap on last session in the gym and ask why they come to the gym. A child offers, 'to keep us healthy'. Mary, 'what part of our body are we trying to keep healthy?' Cara, 'your heart'

Mary explains what they will be learning today. They will be learning, 'ball skills'. A warm up activity where children try to steal the tail from another child. Every child has a tail and they need to try to keep their tail. The winner is the child who steals the biggest number of tails. Squeals of excitement are heard as they race after each other. Music is played while they chase each other and the game ends when the music is switched off. Suitably warmed up the staff explain the next activity. Teams of children are lined up at one end of the gym. Each child has to carry the ball to the end of the gym turn and bounce and catch it all the way back to the next person in the line. Cara is able to carry her ball then bounce and catch it before handing it to the next person in her team. Her concentration and skill in this activity is obvious. Cara tells the staff, 'I go to football'. She adds this while carrying out the next instruction, to dribble the ball up and down the gym.

Eddie is smiling, he manages the activity and shows good levels of concentration as he dribbles the ball.

The team game over the benches are turned on their side and the children stand side by side on a line some way off, taking goal kicks at the benches. Mary and Joan ask the children to count the number of times they 'score' a goal. (*Mary and Jean-practitioners and Cara-Bluebell NC-Fieldwork notes, 1st June 2015*)

Children applied previously acquired 'social skills' sharing and turn-taking, willingly accepting there were winners and losers. Mary and Jean made the learning enjoyable, through the series of activities which were designed to build on children's prior knowledge and facilitate the feeling of being successful. In this short period of time in the gym hall, Cara demonstrated attributes such as turn taking, team working, patience, and number skills such as, sequencing and counting and physical competencies which included, balancing, catching and throwing. There was a strong element of instruction, but this 'adult-initiated' learning was balanced by the fact that on returning to their playroom, Cara and her peers then engaged in child-initiated activities, making choices and having a greater say over the focus of their play (Fisher, 2013).

In the following example, Nadine (practitioner) demonstrated the effectiveness of being responsive to children's motivations.

John leaves his group to play with a set of magnifying glasses, the key worker engages him in questioning about what he might use them for but he is not paying attention to her questions. She encourages him to pay closer attention to her questions.

Lily and Belle are playing in the house corner when they realise the outdoor space is open they rush to put on their coats.

Kenny and one other child choose a number game [Nadine is using the camera to capture their achievements]. With support from her they complete the game which invites them to match cards which have pictures and numbers on them. They have to pick out a number of plastic strips and screw them onto the number card. Kenny gets his correct by bolting blue strips onto a card which has a six on it.

Lily chooses a box with shapes inside and sorts them into colours and shapes. Nadine invites her to describe what she is doing and she responds by counting three circles, one each of green, red and yellow.

(*John, Lily, Kenny and Belle and Nadine-practitioner-Mistletoe Nursery-Fieldwork notes, 20th May 2015*).

Responding to children's motivations and interests showed Nadine's skill as a practitioner and the quality and judgement of her interventions. The children's various interests, in the magnifying glasses, in the number game and in the shape sorting activity, were supported and extended by Nadine in such a way that the children retained the ownership of the learning. Nadine seemed to be meeting the needs of the individual children, provoking their thinking and providing support to extend their learning. Her timely interventions facilitated Kenny's successful completion of the number game.

Meanwhile, Lily experienced success in the sorting and counting game she selected. Throughout this observation, children had opportunities to lead

their learning with some support from Nadine. The next steps in learning for these children would most likely feature in a discussion at a planning meeting with the practitioner team. As Fisher (2013) suggests, successful, confident children are more likely to make progress in their learning.

In another setting, at Bluebell Nursery, the pedagogical approach observed contrasted with the predominantly child-focussed practice in Mistletoe Nursery.

> Janet and the group of children are seated at a table which has a set of alphabet stamps, paint in open trays and pre-cut envelope shapes. Janet is encouraging and supporting children to choose the letters that make up their name and to then dip the stamp in paint then press onto the envelope.
>
> (*Janet-practitioner, Bluebell NC-Fieldwork notes, 1st June 2015*).

In my view, children's choices were limited, the environment offered few opportunities for children to be creative. I perceived that the adult-directed learning activity had no obvious connection to the children's interests or with their previous learning.

6.4.2 Teaching approaches used in P1

In this next section, I will show that the pedagogical style used by the four P1 teachers involved more structured lessons and fewer opportunities for children to have autonomy over where and how to complete the activities set

for them. In the following interview extract, Laura, the P1 teacher justified her use of whole class teaching approaches.

At the beginning we do whole class activities and then not long after you can see the differences of who can be challenged and which ones need support. (Laura, teacher-interview, October, 2015, Bluebell PS)

Laura justified the use of whole class teaching as a means of helping her to get to know the children and to gauge their learning abilities, their strengths and weaknesses. In this next example, Roddie was sitting on the carpet with his peers in the P1 class. While the children in the two nursery settings did have 'carpet time', this was mainly used for singing, listening to a story or when children chose to join learning activities offered by the key worker during small group times. During the fieldwork, I observed that this practice of carpet time for whole class teaching sessions was favoured by the four P1 teachers.

Laura, the teacher is leading a recap session before turning to another traditional tale. The focus of the discussion is about the characters in the Little Red Riding Hood story. The children are asked about who is their favourite character. Responses are taken from the children who are then issued with a sheet of paper that has four of the characters from the story.

They have to choose their favourite, cut it out then stick the picture onto a larger sheet of paper then colour the picture. They have to

order/sequence the characters according to how much they like them.

Once they are finished they are reminded by Laura where to put their

work and that the next task is to take out their whiteboard and pen and

have a go at writing their name.

Hildur, 'I am tidying the bits of paper [another child] left on the table.

One other child offers to retell the story using his sequenced pictures as a prompt.

Roddie settles to his task. He is concentrating on cutting out and

uses the scissors well.

He does so while chatting socially to boy beside him.

Cara seeks permission from Laura (teacher) to tackle the next task.

Hildur and [another child] chat about their families- they talk

about the names of their little cousins and about their own names.

Roddie continues his chat with boy beside him, 'mine is purple'

(he is referring to his transformer toy).

Roddie, 'after school today my gran and grampa are taking me to

Farmfoods to get stickers.'

Small group challenge this, 'you don't get stickers in Farmfoods

it is Lidl that sells them,

Roddie ignores this piece of information and asks,

'do you want a shot of my electric scooter?

You need to be careful, you can come round to my house for dinner'

Laura, 'you are right wee blether Roddie, she turns to rest of

class and praises the quiet workers.

Roddie continues, 'yes I have got the cold. My wee brother hits

me all the time. He slammed the door on my nose, I didn't cry, I

was so brave' 'it was my birthday yesterday', he tells his group

all about his birthday and that he got an electric scooter.

Laura reminds both Roddie and another boy to get on with their work.

Roddie largely ignores the reminder and gets up and goes to his

tray to get his pencil case.

He brings it back and begins to describe the contents of the

pencil case and what he uses each thing for.

Laura provides a further reminder to get on with their work.

(*Laura-teacher and Roddie and Hildur-Bluebell PS-Fieldwork notes,*

21st September 2015).

The whole class sequencing activity featured on Laura's (P1 teacher) timetable as a literacy session. The lesson was assigned a set amount of time and in that time the children were expected to experience a new skill or apply a skill they had already acquired and complete a task. Roddie demonstrates some reluctance regarding the series of tasks he had to complete. These were underpinned by a set of organisational rules; knowing where to place completed work, knowing what the next task would be and an expectation that Roddie would collect the necessary resources to complete his task. The structure of the school day offered the children some opportunity to be independent, to organise themselves. Roddie's resistance to these new routines, contrasted with how he approached a task or activity he had chosen by himself when in his nursery setting. Laura (P1 teacher) ended the lesson, by inviting children to share their learning.

Children are now sitting back on the carpet as a class. They are invited to say what they have learned this morning. Laura, the teacher uses lollipop sticks to select children to respond- Roddie tells Laura who his favourite character is and outlines why, 'the wolf, because he is scary'. Hildur tells the teacher that she enjoyed writing her letters on the white board.

(*Laura-teacher and Roddie and Hildur-Bluebell PS classroom-Fieldwork notes, 21st September 2015).*

By inviting feedback from children, Laura provoked a rebalancing of power, where Roddie and Hildur took back some ownership of their learning, an opportunity for them to become equal partners in the learning experience, where their opinions, their knowledge of themselves as learners may yet be recognised (Peters, 2015)

In Buttercup Primary School, the P1 teacher Alison, adopted a similar teaching approach to that observed in Bluebell Primary School. Eddie's class were brought together to go over what they had been learning and to share their learning. They were all sitting close to Alison (P1 teacher) on the carpet. Another child reads out her story. Alison used this opportunity to remind children of the key aspects of the lesson-how to write a sentence correctly.

Eddie finds it tricky to settle to tasks on his own and Alison uses her teaching approaches to include him. His peers are given the opportunity to talk about what they have learned and by modelling

what others can do, Eddie is exposed to reinforcing how to write a sentence correctly. His particular learning style is partially accommodated within this very structured plenary lesson. Eddie is the 'sticker guy' and he is charged with giving, 'high fives' and a sticker to children after they have shared their learning. The bell rang and it was time to play. (*Alison-teacher and Eddie-Buttercup PS-Fieldwork notes, 22nd October 2015).*

Eddie found it hard to engage with the P1 learning environment, his learning style appeared to be better suited to having flexible boundaries, in a space where he felt he retained some of the control. His active involvement in the literacy lesson limited, beyond being asked to give out stickers.

In Bluebell Primary School, Laura (P1 teacher) used a checking-in technique after playtime, to gauge how well her class were feeling. Her focus on their wellbeing was relevant as a means of determining how ready the children were to learn before she began the lesson. There was structure to the number lesson, for example, by having the recap session Laura was able to identify those children who needed extra support. She kept the pace of the learning brisk by involving the children in a throw and catch the ball activity. She hooked the children into the lesson by getting them to remember how they organised the circle of children on a previous occasion. The teaching approaches, while clearly planned to follow a specific order, also provided the children with a familiarity they recognised and responded to positively. They seemed familiar with the pedagogical practices, which included being asked

to complete a task following the teaching input. The approaches used by Laura on this occasion, formed the basic building blocks of teaching and classroom organisation techniques observed in lessons in the four P1 classrooms. In this next example, of an early numeracy lesson, there was a balance between teacher-directed activity and children's involvement.

Laura checks in with the children and asks if they all had a good playtime? She explains they are going to be doing number work now. She conducts a recap of previous learning, children are motivated and keen to show off what they remember about their numbers to ten. A lively warm up using a ball passed round the circle shows that most children can count down from ten to zero. Laura then explains they are going to learn about patterns today, 'who can remember how we arranged our circle last time?'

Roddie shouts out, 'girl boy girl boy'

Laura explains that today they need to help make a new blanket for granny-the wolf ruined her blanket. The children are asked if they recall that bit of the story. Volunteers are sought to retell the story, those that speak recall events very accurately.

Laura explains the task is to make a new patterned blanket using a sheet of A4 which has been lined with 4 centimetre squares and squares of coloured paper and glue. Before the activity Laura demonstrates using a software programme, then she invites children to create a pattern on the smart board. (*Laura-teacher and Roddie-Bluebell PS-Fieldwork notes, 21st September 2015*)

During the lesson, Laura used formative assessment strategies to establish how much the children had remembered about the traditional tale. The children then worked independently on a series of tasks. This example, shows how attributes such as self-organisation and competencies such as working together were promoted during this lesson. In the literacy lesson, the children received praise, they were encouraged to use self-help skills, to engage with technology and to work collaboratively with peers. It seemed to me, in those early days in their P1 classroom, that to the children, some of the pedagogical approaches employed by Laura would have felt familiar.

Children needed to be adept at responding to demands on them to learn a new set of rules during their literacy lesson, such as, invoking the 'golden rules' for working and putting your name on finished work. Rules they learned as part of the culture of the classroom, quickly became part of the routines of the day. Most of the children, appeared to accept the boundaries placed upon them with no obvious sign of being phased by the expectations placed upon them. McNair (2016) encourages us to ask children what they think about the rules of the classroom, to open up a dialogue with children that would empower children to challenge the norms that are imposed on them by adults.

> Laura recaps on the story-Little Red Riding Hood. The children are invited to tell her which for them was the best bit of the story and to say why. Laura uses lollipop sticks to choose who will offer an answer.

Laura now explains what the activities are for this next part of the morning. Children are reminded that they are responsible for collecting their own resources and for working respectfully with those sitting at their group. Laura asks the children if they can remember any of the golden rules for working on activities.

Hildur offers 'we use quiet voices' this response is praised and another child offers 'we mustn't forget to put our name on our work'

Laura sends the children off one group at a time to collect resources and to get started on their tasks.

(*Laura, teacher-Bluebell PS-Fieldwork notes, 21st September 2015*)

In this final extract, at the start of the numeracy lesson, the teacher, Holly prompted children to think about what they were going to learn. She included children in the early part of the lesson, by getting them to work out the specific focus of the learning and intended outcome:

Holly poses the question 'what are we learning today?' children chorus-numbers all the way to 20. What are we doing with them? Children respond by offering 'writing the numbers, pegging the numbers, ordering the numbers, using them in rhymes' The children all together recite the numbers from 1 to 20. Each group is then assigned a task.

Children generally settle to their respective tasks.

Lewis is busy pegging out his numbers and works well with others in his group.

Kathleen is quietly compliant though the noise in the classroom

is building and just after 9.40 Holly asks children to stop and tidy

up their number station and prepare to move to the next one.

Walter's concentration wavers. Belle asks to go to the toilet.

Belle is playing snap and is quickly successful. She gets all the

'snaps' on the screen correct. I asked her if is she thought she

was good at numbers? She responds to say, 'yes' 'I was good in

the nursery too'. It is obvious she has well developed one to one

correspondence skills.

(*Holly, teacher-Mistletoe PS-Fieldwork notes, 22nd September 2015)*.

Once the initial teaching was complete, the children were assigned tasks. Each group organised themselves, collected resources, and settled down to the task. Holly's intention was to circulate and support individuals or smaller groups.   As the lesson progressed, Belle and Walter seemed to lose concentration, engaging in avoidance activities such as needing the toilet. Other children began to talk and the environment became noisy and the class unsettled. However, Kathleen and Lewis showed resilience and stuck with the prescribed task. Children in each group moved to the next 'station' when asked to do so by Holly. The children learned the routines, moved to the next station even when they had not had time to complete their first task. They accepted the need to stop what they were doing and start anew on the next activity.

6.5   Summarising pedagogy and teaching approaches

The nursery practitioners' pedagogy seemed more responsive to children's emerging needs and interests. The practitioners facilitated learning by observing, asking questions, suggesting different ways of tackling a problem or by simply standing back to see if children resolve matters for themselves (Fisher, 2013). It appeared the practitioners guided and supported children to gain new skills in a child-centred way through their social interaction and interventions (Rogoff, 1990). Their pedagogy was often spontaneous (Froebel, 1887) in response to a child's question or as a result of their reading of a situation that required a specific action on the part of the practitioner. The practitioners responded to children's needs as they happened rather than being constrained by the delivery of a pre-determined skill or knowledge linked to a specific curriculum subject. Practitioners also planned specific learning activities that were intended to support children's acquisition of new knowledge and skills. By adopting a reflexive pedagogy; which acknowledged and included the need to implement the 'experiences and outcomes' of the 'early level' curriculum, practitioners were more likely to create learning conditions that empower young children to learn (Scottish Government, 2014a).

Teachers by comparison, followed a set timetable governed by the structure of the school day and they generally delivered a range of whole class and small group lessons. Teachers worked directly with children in groups, pairs

and or in one to one activities. In P1, there was a greater focus on direct teaching approaches compared with the child-initiated pedagogy observed in the nursery settings. Interactions with children in both cases were supportive, though more instructional in P1 than the adult-child interactions observed in the two nursery settings.

Teachers planned lessons in advance, with the specific intention of teaching new skills and knowledge or honing and applying existing skills in other contexts. Direct teaching was often followed up with the completion of a series of tasks which were often differentiated by outcome, though sometimes tasks were differentiated to meet children's specific levels of ability. Formative assessment approaches were used alongside summative assessment approaches to support future planning and record progress; identifying how well and how much children have learned. Curriculum subjects were timetabled across the school week, but with some degree of flexibility around the time spent teaching each curriculum area. Teachers used individual curriculum area programmes of study and commercially produced resources more than practitioners in the nursery settings to determine the content of the learning activities. Children in P1 were expected to follow the routines set and had less opportunity to choose where and when in the classroom they completed the tasks and activities that were set for them by their teachers.

6.6   Chapter conclusions

The findings from this chapter show that the practitioners and teachers operate within two 'early level' traditions. These 'early level' traditions were influenced by institutional structures, cultures and pedagogical practices peculiar to each microsystem. The practitioners and teachers demonstrated these influences in the methods they used for planning activities, in their relationships and their interactions with children and parents and in their preferred teaching styles

Chapter 7: Findings 2: supporting children's transition across two 'early level' traditions from nursery to school

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of the differences in planning and pedagogical approaches used by practitioners and teachers to deliver the 'early level' curriculum. I described how practitioners and teachers in this study engaged with parents and children during transitions activities. In this chapter, the findings in relation to research questions 2 and 3 will be presented. These questions are:

Research question *2: What do parents do to support their child as they transition across the 'early level' curriculum from nursery to P1? (Theme 2)*

Research question *3: How is the continuity of children's learning, agency and social capital affected by their transition across the 'early level' from nursery to P1? (Theme 3)*

As with the previous chapter, findings from the 'nursery early level' case will be reported first and then findings related to the 'P1 early level' case. I draw comparisons between the two cases and summarise the findings in relation to the two research questions and related themes. Throughout the chapter, data extracts were chosen to provide authenticity to the perspectives of the practitioners, teachers, and parents to enhance the validity of the discussion.

7.1 The 'nursery early level' case

This section illustrates the ways in which parents support their child as they are preparing to leave nursery. I will demonstrate that parents at this point in the transition process focus primarily on their child's wellbeing. They draw on their own social capital to smooth their child's transition to school (Dufer *et al.*, 2013; Westcott *et al.*). I will touch on how parents recognised that their child needed 'to reorient themselves' and that a shift in the child's identity occurred (Ackesjö, 2014:3) as they move between the two 'early level' traditions.

7.1.1 Parental support for children while still in nursery

Parents supported their child in a variety of ways. These included making a contribution to learning during daily playroom activities or by attending transition meetings and priming events which helped parents feel confident about supporting their child during their transition to school and also at home by practising skills learned in nursery and school.

Collaborative engagement with teachers, such as attending priming events while their child still attended nursery, helped parents feel included in the transition process, to know what to do to support their child before they started school (Shields, 2009). As the extract below shows:

> *They are having a parents' night in a few weeks where we will get more information. We have had a previous parents meeting where we found out about the setup of the school and the buddy system, what is in place for them and how they will work it. We get letters as well. It*

> *has been helpful because the school is alongside the nursery and they*
>
> *have been in visiting so it makes it easier for them.*
>
> *(Lydia, parent, Mistletoe Nursery)*

Lydia highlighted that regular communication between her and the setting and school was a culturally enabling factor; which equipped her with the information she needed to support Belle's transition to school. However, in the following example, I perceived the information Codie (parent) received was less enabling, suggesting a need to adhere to the cultural norms of school:

> *We have had a meeting with the school and the HT was very good.*
>
> *They haven't explained any topics or activities. They have just*
>
> *explained the basics of what to do, what will happen on the first day,*
>
> *uniforms, what to expect and what to do for their lunches. Just giving*
>
> *us general information and telling us about PE days but not*
>
> *specifically topics that she will cover. I think you just think to yourself*
>
> *that they will start off covering just basic reading and maths.*
>
> *(Codie-parent, Mistletoe Nursery)*

While receiving the information was useful on one level, in terms of empowering the parent to support their child, to know the rules, it could be seen as unhelpful in establishing a supportive partnership and reciprocal relationships with the parent. In almost all of the responses from parents, positive peer relationships and friendships, which Dockett and Perry (2004) refer to as 'positive dispositions', were considered important wellbeing

elements for smoothing the child's transition. However, for two of the children, making friends in nursery had been difficult at first. Eddie and Walter who attended different nursery settings took time to adjust and to establish relationships with their nursery peers. Libby (parent) considered this was a stage in his development, she appeared to reassure herself that this was a moment in time:

> *He has made lots of friends, but he struggled at the start and this*
> *worried me as he doesn't have any younger siblings or cousins.*
> *However I think that was just a stage in his development.*
> *(Libby-parent, Bluebell NC)*

Patricia (parent) also felt that making friends was important. Her comments suggest that forming friendships was something she wanted for her son as she acknowledges his nervousness:

> *I think he is getting into his own a bit more he is quite.. not shy but he*
> *was quite nervous about meeting other children but he has been able*
> *to get a nice group of friends. (Patricia-parent, Mistletoe Nursery)*

In this next example, as well as sustaining social connections, a change in her child's identity is alluded to by Lydia (parent):

> *She is looking forward to seeing some of her old nursery friends as*
> *she bumps into them a lot and to be a big girl in school with them.*
> *(Lydia-parent, Mistletoe Nursery)*

The literature describes, how starting school brings with it dynamic change for children and families, that involve them engaging with a different environment or microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and in line with Woodhead (2008), this also brings changes to the child's personal and social identity. Ackesjö asserts children during the transition to school process, negotiate who they are in relation to 'who they are not', they construct and reconstruct themselves over time, over the whole transitions process, (2014: 6). In making sense of their new *self* they 'both shape transitions and are shaped by transitions' (ibid: 6), Rogoff, (2003) considers that transitions are social processes during which children catch sight of themselves, of their current identity. For this study, I perceived that the child's identity altered from that of 'nursery child' and over time, to a 'school child'.

Vandenbroeck asserts that helping young children develop positive identities is a challenge for educators and [for parents] and that 'acquiring new identities compatible with the expectations of the new environment may involve a risky adaptation for young children' (2008: 26). Woodhead notes that 'the construction of identity through relationships with others is an essentially dynamic and social process' (2008:6). Fran (parent) illustrates this point:

> *A few of her friends from nursery are already in P1. So I think she is*
> *more looking forward to just being at school and being in the*
> *playground and just being in P1 and being a 'bigger girl'.*
> *(Fran-parent, Bluebell NC)*

As well as sustaining social relationships and identity reconstruction, the findings showed parents used their social capital, their own close personal relationship with their child to provide the support they needed in relation to transitioning to school (Margetts, 2002). As Turunen and Kearney (2016) assert 'linked lives create micro-family history, consisting of shared experiences and incidents during the family career' (2016: 71). Jan (parent) described how she supported her son's learning and how she involved his siblings:

> *I ask him every day and we talk about what he has been doing at nursery when he comes home. When I am sitting with him he tells me he has been reciting months of the year to me and learning songs with numbers. He brings it home although he doesn't realise that he is doing it. He will ask me what word rhymes with another word. I know that is coming from the nursery so we help to try and develop that at home so he can be ready for school. He has brothers and sisters so we make that into a game in the car for example. We got communication with the nursery through the newsletters so they tell us what they are doing, what has been going on, what projects they have been doing. (Jan-parent, Mistletoe Nursery)*

Miell (1990) notes parents and children exercise agency and their sense of 'self' in preparing for and adjusting to the differences in the culture, environment and learning activities in primary school. One of the parents, Codie, weighed up the advantages of talking about the move to school and

chose to not overplay this. Her approach showed her use of social capital, she had the confidence to adopt a specific approach, suggesting that she knew what was best for her child:

> *Just talking about it. We have spoken about it for long enough so over the summer we are going to go out and get her new shoes, her bag etc. However I don't want to talk about it too much, because that can be bad too. (Codie-parent, Mistletoe Nursery)*

In this further example, Codie (parent) also described how the family exploited the normal routines of home life to support Kathleen, helping her feel confident and in tune with the expectations of school life:

> *Generally at home we read a lot and we colour in and do all the normal things that five year old children do. The nursery doesn't necessarily encourage you to do it but I think they already assume you do these things at home already. They were doing the road safety campaign and they were encouraging us to carry it on at home, listen and to look left and right. (Codie-parent, Mistletoe Nursery)*

In this section, I have shown that parents in this study, at times when they and their children are engaged in identity reconstruction (Ackesjö, 2014), drew on their social and cultural capital to support their child. Dufur *et al.* (2013), in their study assert that social capital is created in both the family and at school. For this study, parents focused on their child's emotional wellbeing, ensuring the child retained, renewed and created new social

connections. Furthermore, they incorporated the institutional expectations of starting school into family activities to help their child become familiar with the routines of the school day. I posit, that by approaching the transition in this way, parents felt they had some control and agency over the changes that were inevitable during the transition to school. By acting in this way, parents not only deployed their own resources, but increased their child's social capital, thereby, enabling the child to embrace this complex period in their lives. As Dufer *et al.* (2013), point out 'the social capital created in multiple contexts are closely connected' (Dufer *et al*, 2013: 6), which I interpret to mean, that by working together with their child, parents can generate in their children, a confident attitude towards the move to school.

7.2   The 'P1 early level' case

In this next section, I outline some further supporting mechanisms used by parents as their child stepped out of the nursery 'early level' tradition and into the P1 'early level' tradition. Recognising and supporting children's bioecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and sociocultural (Bourdieu, 1983) positions between the two 'early level' traditions, is a significant thread which runs throughout this study.

7.2.1 Parental support for children starting school-a shifting of priorities

Once the children moved to school, parents continued to support their children, although the nature of the support altered, from a social and emotional wellbeing focus, to concentrating more on their child's progress in learning. Responses from parents included '*when sitting at the dinner table*

counting different objects' and '*I can contribute 100% to her learning and what she needs me to do to help her'.* Parents welcomed opportunities to help at school events and to attend information evenings. Patricia (parent), perceived these opportunities as useful:

> *I think getting the chance to go in to the school and help and get a better idea of what they are doing in the classroom. The information evening is helpful and possibly getting the chance to go into a class of P1s just to get the basics and get ideas of activities and that would maybe help. I think being able to help implement parts of the curriculum would help. (Patricia-parent, Mistletoe PS)*

Parents viewed homework as a necessary aspect of school life and one which they accommodated within the life of the family. As Arlene (parent) described below, homework took precedence over other activities. Family routines were adjusted to deliver this cultural expectation:

> *She is getting a lot of homework and she has been getting that since day one and that is part of what she is learning in school. The first thing we do when we get home is her homework and a lot of that is writing out new words, writing out numbers and repetition of writing things out a few times. Also drawing things that begin with certain letters and doing homework which is things she is learning about is good. (Arlene-parent, Bluebell PS)*

Lydia (parent) was seeking information about what was happening in school and it wasn't forthcoming. She expressed some sympathy for the teacher, citing the teacher to pupil ratios in classrooms as a probable cause for the lack of communication from the teacher. This shows that while there was some recognition of the challenges facing teachers, infrequent communication was a socially inhibiting factor for this parent, in terms of being able to provide targeted support at home:

> *Any type of feedback is good and sometimes it's difficult to know because the feedback sometimes isn't very clear as to how they are doing and it would be good to know if there is an area that they might need to focus on more. Communication could be better for example by email. A teacher has 25-30 pupils so understandably this could be difficult. (Lydia-parent, Mistletoe PS)*

Regular communication was also important to Patricia (parent). For her, the lack of information coincided with a time when Walter was struggling to hold his pencil:

> *He seems to be getting on really well the only concerns I have is when he is holding his pencil and forming his letters, he is struggling with that but I have highlighted this. There is a parents meeting coming up so hopefully they will be able to give me a bit more feedback on that. (Patricia-parent, Mistletoe PS)*

It was interesting, that Walter's mum felt she needed to wait for a scheduled meeting to allay her fears beyond having informed the school suggests she was less confident about how to approach the school to seek a solution. This example illustrates the sociocultural differences which existed between the two cases. I did wonder, if a similar situation had occurred while Walter was in nursery, would the practice of speaking informally on a daily basis to practitioners have generated an immediate face-to face discussion and possibly an intervention to reassure this parent and resolve the issue. The institutional 'leave them at the gate' approach reflective of school culture appeared to influence how this parent viewed school protocols.

In the following three examples, the parents talked about how they supported their child's learning. By attending the transition events organised by the school, I perceived that they felt they were better placed to practice and reinforce the child's acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills at home. Without realising, the parents had also changed their status, their identities, from being a 'nursery' parent to donning the identity of a 'school' parent, which involved 'coping with his/her own transition towards being a competent parent of a school child' (Griebel and Niesel, 2009:66). In an effort to support their child, to ensure they had every opportunity to be successful in P1, I considered that parents accepted the institutional norms and structures that epitomise the sociocultural systems that surround the school day, where learning takes place in pre-determined chunks of time. The strategies the parents were advised to employ, to aid the acquisition of literacy and

numeracy skills while rooted in real life contexts, still conveyed to me a compliance agenda:

> *The information evening they had was really informative. They showed us the type of things they do in class and the activities that they do and the sorts of things that we could do at home. Using basic things like 'how many forks do you think I have' that you think are obvious but you don't realise this can help and small strategies that you can you do really easily. (Iona-parent, Mistletoe PS)*

> *With regards to homework you have to be quite proactive so you have to supervise and help them. They were asked about things in the house that began with the letter 'S' so I decided we would go about the house to see if there was anything with that letter and again trying to make it a bit more fun. (Diane-parent, Mistletoe PS)*

> *They mentioned about doing things like when sitting at the dinner table counting different objects and the example of if you had two fish fingers and you took one away how many would you have.*
> *It isn't just about numbers it can be items and just general chat to help with different skills. (Fran-parent, Bluebell PS)*

In almost all of the 'primary' parent interviews, the focus of their support, within the school microsystem, was aimed at consolidating learning skills at home and fitting into the specific school routines and systems. Arguably, a dynamic shift from their earlier supporting mechanisms, which were

associated with the organisational elements of settling into school and their children being happy. However, Fran (parent) did raise a wellbeing issue, which was soon resolved:

> *The only thing I've had a slight issue with is she is not quite sure when she can go to the toilet. I discussed this with the teacher as I didn't want it to become a big issue. This has been sorted now though thankfully. (Fran-parent, Bluebell PS)*

7.3   Summarising how parents support their children during transition

I have shown that parents in this study actively supported their child's move to school. In the weeks prior to the child leaving nursery, the focus of parental support was on how well their child would make and sustain friendships as they 'construct, co-construct and reconstruct' their identities (Woodhead, 2008). As members of the nursery microsystem, parents took part in priming events, systems to help ease children adapt their behaviour to the 'physical, social and philosophical' differences of the school environment (Fabian and Dunlop, 2007:3). These transition to school programmes offered parents opportunities to be included in the child's transition, to help their child feel good socially and emotionally and actively benefit from positive reciprocal relationships. However, in comparing the two cases, the transition to school arrangements varied according to the culture of the organisation, and ecological environment, (Kienig, 1998, 2002).

As time passed and children started school, parents shifted the focus of their support. It was evident, that the parents were now aware of additional

institutional demands placed on children by the school. As Einarsdottir asserts 'children are expected to become familiar with and adjust to the rhythms of the nursery day and the school day, complying with these routines throughout their play and learning activities' (Einarsdottir, 2004: no page number). Parents demonstrated their concerns about how they could support their children as they experienced unfamiliar processes, ways of operating, rules and expectations, such as learning about the curriculum, finding out how to behave in the classroom and completing planned learning activities. In comparing the 'nursery early level' case, with the 'P1 early level' case, parents recognised starting school would present their child with challenges that did not reflect their previous experience. Parents also expected change to occur in terms of regular communication, active engagement and influence over their child's learning experiences in school.

7.4 The impact of learning in nursery and primary school on children's learning, agency and social capital

In the previous section, I described what parents did to support their child's wellbeing and learning as they moved from their nursery setting and into P1. In the next two sections, and in relation to answering research question 3, I will show that the different types of curriculum and learning experiences children have in nursery and in P1 impacted on how children learned, exercised agency and drew on their social capital.

7.4.1 The 'nursery early level' case-how children learn, exercise agency and draw on their social capital

Almost all of the learning activities observed in the two nursery settings emerged spontaneously during free play or were planned by practitioners in response to children's specific interests, needs and wishes. The value of learning through play, was recognised by Arlene (parent):

> *I think for me a big priority in nursery is the play side of things, being*
>
> *happy and developing socially and they are learning through play. I*
>
> *think when they start school they get a lot more involved with that*
>
> *[the curriculum]. (Arlene-parent, Bluebell NC)*

Outdoor play was also identified by parents as a necessary vehicle for learning:

> *My child is very much an outdoor boy, he is good at imaginative play.*
>
> *The nursery has the outdoor area and they are very happy for him to*
>
> *be playing in this and for him to come home with a stick as he sees*
>
> *that as his sword. They are good at encouraging imaginative play. If*
>
> *there is anything that he is interested in then I think they would help*
>
> *to develop it and encourage him. (Iona-parent, Mistletoe Nursery)*

However, during the summer term before they started school, a change in the way children learned was commented on by Jan (parent). In her view the

structured learning activities in nursery were linked to preparing John for school:

> It [learning] is more structured now that they have gone into their pre-school and so they have tailored it for them to be ready for when they go into P1. (Jan-parent, Mistletoe Nursery)

Parents perceived that nursery offered more time to play and that their child engaged regularly in long periods of free play. As Fisher reminds us 'play allows children to gain mastery over and to be in control of their emerging skills and competences. Through play, children can make things happen- they can become another person, they can influence a story or a situation' (Fisher, 2013:18).

Learning activities in the two nursery settings were often initiated by children's play, then supported and extended by practitioners. Here, I observed Kenny and one other child not part of the study, building a den.

> Kenny is in the 'wigwam' structure with a friend. They begin building a wall round the wigwam using the giant wooden blocks to create a den. They use mathematical language appropriately, 'look the wall is getting taller', as an aside Kenny tells me I have the same name as his auntie. He and his friend lie down in their den. Not content with the design they ask for the big bits of fabric, Nadine sets off to find them. Meanwhile the boys are rearranging the internal elements of the den. Moving the bricks to make more space to lie down, till

eventually they are almost pushed outside and the fabrics become the

key elements. They hide behind the draped material. Percussion

instruments which were tied to the structure by staff are removed by

the boys as these are not seen as important to their new creation.

Kenny pops out to look for the torches and some books. Once again

Nadine assists locating two torches. Then Kenny decides he will take

a drum into the den and he sits there tapping the surface. This activity

lasts more than twenty minutes. Eventually the boys venture off to

other parts of the playroom.

(Mistletoe Nursery, Fieldwork notes, 22nd May 2015)

During the child-initiated learning activity illustrated above, involving Kenny

and his friend, I noticed they cooperated fully in their quest to build their den.

They sought support only when they decided they needed it from Nadine.

Skills of collaboration and attributes such as, team work were employed.

They negotiated what needed to be done and they communicated effectively

in the process. They used problem solving skills, including quite complex

problem solving skills of trial and error, adjusting the design to suit the end

goal, to create a 'den' to use their torches and read.

Observations in the two nursery settings provided numerous examples of

children exercising agency over their learning, and almost all of the time, I

perceived that children determined, 'what, how, where and when' they took

part in learning activities. Although as the next example illustrates, this

practice was not consistent.

Children were engaged in free play from 09.00 until 0920 then they had group time. Eddie and Cara are in the same key worker group. They are in the sunshine room for group time.

Children were invited to talk about their holidays. The practitioner, Lucy had a copy of a passport and a picture of a suitcase. Children offered stories about where they had been on holiday. There was some discussion about what they took with them in their suitcases and how they travelled to their destination.

Lucy gave each child a piece of paper which had been fashioned to resemble the shape of an open suitcase. The children had to fold their suitcase in half and then were issued with pens and asked to write the word, 'suitcase' on another bit of paper.

Eddie states he does not know how to write all the letters. He made an attempt, copying as best he could the flashcard with 'suitcase' written on it and provided by Lucy. He filled the entire space with the letters he was copying.

Cara worked quietly making a fair attempt at forming her letters correctly. Her 'go' was legible but Eddie's wasn't at all legible. Lucy handed the children a pair of scissors and asks them to cut out their word and then stick it to the outside of the paper suitcase. Eddie is not fully focussed on the task, Cara is more enthusiastic and wants to get the job done well.

Eddie is much more interested in talking to Lucy. He gets up and gives her a cuddle. He pats her shoulder. He tries to leave the group

but is reminded he still has his name to write on his suitcase. Lucy

guides his fingers over the letters of his name which she has written

for him on the suitcase. He makes a half-hearted attempt and gives

Lucy back his suitcase. Eddie walks away from the table.

(*Bluebell NC, Fieldwork notes, 22nd May 2015*)

In the learning activity described above, Eddie barely engaged with the practitioner before employing some agentic tactics of his own. He chose to distract Lucy with a cuddle, perhaps in the hope that he could wander off to an activity of his choosing. Eddie in this situation appeared to not wish to engage with the activity, his agenda did not match that of the practitioner. In agreement with Rogoff (1990), finding a balance between investigative learning and guided learning is critically important for getting the learning right for every child.

In the two nursery settings, pre-planned adult-directed learning activities like the one outlined above were infrequent. More often, I observed child-initiated play or practitioners intervening to support child-initiated activities. Sometimes, I observed children actively seeking support from practitioners, who then exercised their professional judgement in determining the level and extent of interaction required to support the child/children.

In this next extract, Lorna (practitioner) intervened only when Lily's investigation in the soil sparked an unexpected interest in an insect that she found.

Lily is trying to fill a plant pot with soil using a spoon. She carries the spoon of soil to the planter and repeats this process for five minutes. Walter is close beside her digging and putting soil into a plastic tumbler. Lily and one other child excitedly declare the have found a bug.

Lily is heard to say 'it might be an insect, I have one in my house'.

Child tells her 'how he found one like it and put it down the toilet pan'

Lily, 'look it is moving', 'does it still look alive?' Lorna suggests they find the magnifying glass to take a closer look.

(*Mistletoe Nursery, Fieldwork notes, 22nd May 2015*)

Lily persevered for quite some time on her transporting activity, *schematic* behaviours clearly at play here (Piaget, 1972). Her learning was, for the most part, solitary. She seemed aware of Walter but did not include him in her investigations. Eventually, she teamed up with another child, but only to announce the discovery of a 'bug' and it was only at this point in this learning episode that Lorna, the practitioner intervened. Until this moment, Lily was in charge of her learning. She dictated the pace of her learning and who would be included in her exploration of the soil. She brought to the investigation, knowledge from home, she had at her disposal resources that she used to inform her thinking. She showed concern for the bug's welfare, wondering if it was still alive, and it was at this point that Lorna stepped in to offer a way of finding out.

In the above scenario, the positive impact on Lily's meaning making of the activity, her learning, agency and social capital relied not just on the relevance and coherence of the exploratory activity but also, on the quality of adult intervention and interaction, be that practitioner or teacher.

In this section, I have shown that in both nursery settings practitioners offered children opportunities to take ownership of their learning and to exercise agency during their nursery sessions. However, I also found that children's learning was occasionally overly directed by practitioners, suggesting some inconsistencies in practice between the two nursery settings.

7.4.2 The 'P1 early level' case-how children learn, exercise agency and draw on their social capital

Children's learning experiences, agency and social capital were affected by their transition to school. They had fewer opportunities to exercise agency in the P1 environment and their coping and adjustment strategies were tested, necessitating a draw on their social capital. In the main, children's learning experiences were restricted to curriculum topics and themes that the teacher determined. Activities were planned in relation to curriculum content in subject specific programmes of study and the fulfilment of local and nationally agreed targets for achieving the 'early level'. A nationally agreed target to be achieved by almost all children in Scottish primary schools by the end of P1.

7.4.3 Moving to P1 and the impact on children's learning, agency and social capital

As children started school, their parents expected school to be different, that their child would encounter a learning environment which placed new

demands on them as individual actors in the education field (Fisher, 2009). Parents perceived the classroom as a place where lessons were timetabled and had a more formal structure. The classroom was where their child would be taught new skills, or reinforce skills already gained, within a particular curricular area such as literacy and numeracy:

> *It is more structured in the school, she[Belle] is telling us that she*
>
> *has maths at a certain time and she has her golden time and PE. The*
>
> *days are more structured and what she is doing. The teaching style*
>
> *has definitely contributed to this and that she has to listen to*
>
> *the teacher.* (*Lydia-parent, Mistletoe PS*)

There was an acceptance according to her mum, Lydia that Belle would need to comply with the classroom routines, and 'listen to the teacher' and that by being a school girl, life in the classroom would be more formal, more regulated and shaped by the teacher directing the learning. The relationship with the school environment expressed here reinforced the formal tone of information conveyed to parents at transition to school events.

In the following extract, Iona (parent) recognised the increased level of demand placed on her daughter in the first few days of primary school:

> *It is a completely different setup, nursery is very much a lot of playing*
>
> *dressing up and having books read to them but I would imagine school*
>
> *is more structured. We see the benefits of homework, we do it with*
>
> *her right away when she comes home.(Iona-parent, Bluebell PS)*

Iona (parent) described the benefits of the structural differences and changes to routines, conceding that homework was a positive aspect of learning in school. She also recognised the role she had to play in supporting Hildur at home. Time was found in the family's lives to make sure the ritual of homework was completed. In fact, homework was viewed by this parent as important and so making adjustments to family life were not unwelcome, indeed they were almost expected as part of the child's learning journey, a 'rite of passage' which, as van Gennep, (1977), asserts, children experience as they shift from one part of the their lives into another, where they need to operate and respond to a new set of demands.

Almost all of the parents interviewed expected school to present their child with new socio-emotional and cognitive challenges. They were not unduly concerned about this, in fact a few were convinced their child needed to be exposed to greater challenges and that they were 'ready' to cope with and adjust to the social and cultural demands of starting school.

Parents appeared to value the acquisition of new skills and recognise that their children were making progress in learning. This shift in thinking was evident once their child had moved to school. When asked for their views on the learning experiences at school, most parents were pleased with their child's progress:

> *Her homework looks really good and being a late goer to school*
>
> *because she is six in January and have seen her improve a lot since*
>
> *she has started school. Her writing has improved, she is counting*

numbers and she is enjoying learning. She has settled in great and is

doing fantastic. (Iona-parent, Bluebell PS)

Parents talked about learning in school as a place where lessons were planned and the child listened to the teacher, with fewer opportunities for children to move about freely:

He struggled in the beginning with the curriculum and the timetable so

to speak, because it was more of a timetable, whereas in nursery it

was more of a small group and they had that one on one and its only

for a short time and they then go on to do their own thing. However in

school it is a timetable of learning and then a little bit of play and then

group activities. (Libby-parent, Buttercup PS)

Margaret however, acknowledged that learning at school could also be active and fun:

They seem to have a more structured day, they have their work but

they don't have them sitting there the whole time they have activities

they can do. I think for my child it has been a bit of a shock because

you don't get that time to just go out and play so I think the structure

he probably finds quite demanding but they do try to add fun into it he

said to me they were playing a song and they had to run to the letter

on the wall and it sounded like he found it fun.

(Margaret-parent, Mistletoe PS)

Spontaneous learning activities were more prevalent in the two nursery settings though not exclusively, and were primarily initiated by children's interests, curiosity and or the need to explore, to investigate, to add to new or existing 'funds of knowledge' (Peters, 2015). In contrast, I noticed that learning activities in the four P1 classrooms were almost always linked to achieving outcomes in a specific curriculum area. As a result, the opportunities for children to make choices or to have ownership of their learning were reduced. Learning activities were less likely to be in direct response to a spontaneous interest, the focus of learning activities were mostly associated with either curricular subjects or a topic.

> Alison (teacher) outlines the next set of activities- first children have two jobs to do. One involves getting a whiteboard and a black marker pen, the other involves coming back and sitting on the floor beside their shoulder partner. Alison praises children for being successful at following instructions and being ready to listen.
> WALT- we are learning to write a sentence. Eddie has his hand up with a response to the question 'what do we need to remember about making a sentence?' Alison asks another child for the answer.
> Alison puts up on the smart board a picture of a farm scene. She uses the lollipop sticks again and Eddie is chosen.
> Alison- What can you see in the picture?
> Eddie, 'I can see a cow, a house and people, a man with a bag' it is a magic bag.' *(Buttercup PS, Fieldwork notes,-22nd October 2015)*

In this episode, Eddie and others had limited choice and agency over the learning activities. They were used as helpers, giving out resources, but this task was also delegated to certain children selected by the teacher. All of the children, regardless of their abilities had the same input from the teacher. Those who had already mastered the skills of writing a sentence accepted the pace of learning required by less accomplished peers. There were opportunities for children to put their hands up to share what they already knew during the whole class lesson, and then an activity which involved them creating their own sentences, back at their desks.

Throughout the time spent on the carpet, Eddie showed resilience, he coped with the teacher's expectations which meant him sitting still, listening, speaking when invited to, completing a set task in a given amount of time, using the resources provided, working alone with no interaction with peers. All of this required Eddie and his peers to have at their disposal a set of skills, resources that enabled them to navigate their way through the school day. The focus of this lesson was relevant in terms of building on the children's early literacy skills. Eddie deployed existing attributes and capabilities, such as being able to take turns and listen, organising himself and occasionally working with others. I conclude that learning in this way stifled children's agency.

7.5   Summarising children's learning, agency and social capital in each case

In comparing the two cases, it is suggested that the learning children experienced in nursery differed from the learning experienced in P1. In the

two nursery settings, children's learning was facilitated mainly through play. Furthermore, during their play, children had numerous opportunities to exercise agency. In the two nursery settings, children brought with them the learning accrued at home, (Peters *et al.*, 2018). Overall, they had opportunities and permission to use that learning to guide their choice of resources and make decisions about where, when and for how long they wanted to engage with a learning activity (Carr, 2000). If they chose to play by themselves, they could do so. Children sometimes came together as a small group to take part in a practitioner-led activity where they were encouraged to join in the learning activity, but this was never enforced. If a child was perceived to be missing out on learning opportunities afforded by the environment, I noticed that practitioners supported them to access the curriculum either by practitioners themselves or by being drawn into learning scenarios by their peers. Children could deepen their knowledge or extend their skills, sometimes by watching and listening to their friends. When Kenny and his friend built their den, they collaborated, problem solved and persevered until they had achieved the desired outcome, enhanced by a request for support from Nadine (see p200).

In the 'P1 early level' case, the learning activities were mostly associated with subject specific lessons. Children had fewer opportunities to influence teacher determined learning experiences or indeed the outcomes. Learning was often followed up with a task or an activity, often designed to be completed by the individual child, in the form of a worksheet or page in a workbook or jotter. Their learning was sometimes passive. Children followed

the rules of the 'P1 early level' because that was what was expected of them. They found themselves adjusting to a new culture, where learning no longer felt spontaneous, driven by their agenda, rather the agenda belonged to the teacher, where the rules of engagement were at that time, unfamiliar. Sometimes children would be assigned a task that involved working alone or with another child or part of a small group using for example, scissors and glue, using commercial materials to count or measure or accessing computers and laptops to complete an activity. In most lessons I observed, children would come together at the end or part way through an activity to share their learning, to describe how well they had achieved or completed the activity. An opportunity to exercise agency. Children regularly received praise and encouragement for their efforts in achieving the outcomes of the learning activity. Children responded positively to this recognition of their efforts, signposting to them that some of the institutional approaches in P1 were becoming more familiar.

7.6   Chapter conclusions

This chapter began by presenting the mechanisms that parents deployed to support their child's transition to school. Over time, parents concerned themselves less with the emotional implications of starting school. They shifted their focus onto providing support for their children's learning. Achieving well at school now seemed more important. Parents were keen to be part of their child's school experience. However, I perceived that the institutional barriers of the school system sometimes get in the way, potentially inhibiting and weakening parents' and children's agency.

I have illustrated that play-based pedagogy provided the conduit for almost all of children's learning within the 'nursery early level' case. In the 'P1 early level' case, children's learning was channelled into subject specific activity, in an environment where coverage of curriculum programmes shaped the type of learning that took place. I concluded that children learned to conform to the routines in P1, adjusting over time to having fewer opportunities to exercise agency over their learning. Similarly, by pulling together their individual and collective resources, children's social capital was strengthened as they adjusted, coped with and grew in confidence in a culturally different microsystem.

Chapter 8: Discussion of findings

Introduction

This aim of this chapter is to set out and discuss the key findings as they relate to the research questions posed at the beginning of this study. The previous two data chapters presented the key findings for this study.

- Chapter 6 provided an analysis of the curriculum planning, and the pedagogy and teaching approaches used by practitioners and P1 teachers in each tradition.

- Chapter 7 focussed on the ways in which parents supported their child during the transition to school and how transitioning between the two 'early level' traditions impacted on children's learning, agency and social capital.

While Chapter 6 reported findings with regard to **research question 1** (*how is curriculum continuity achieved*), Chapter 7 focussed on **research question 2** (*what do parents do to support their child*) and **research question 3** (*identifying impact on children's learning, agency and social capi*tal).

8.1   Research findings

In this chapter, the six research findings and a number of sub-related findings are discussed in direct relationship to the research questions and the literature on transitions. These are summarised below in Table 8 and then each finding is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Key finding	Sub-related findings
1: Variations in how practitioners and P1 teachers planned the 'early level' influenced continuity or discontinuity in the 'early level' curriculum and in children's learning experiences. (RQ1)	Practitioners worked alongside each other in the nursery settings to plan curriculum activities. Their approaches to planning the 'early level' were flexible and responsive to the interests and needs of the children.

P1 teachers adopted planning approaches that were tightly structured. They appeared to be under more pressure to evidence children's achievement of the 'early level'.

When practitioners and P1 worked together to plan the content of the 'early level', children benefited from greater curriculum continuity and progression in their learning. |
| **2: Where there was frequent dialogue and collaboration between practitioners as well as between P1 teachers and with parents, the 'early level' curriculum activities took greater account of children's prior learning. (RQ1)** | The sociocultural environment and pedagogical practice in the nursery settings acknowledged the learning children bring with them from home.

By working collaboratively, practitioners were more successful in planning and implementing the 'early level' as intended; this was a child-led, responsive, coherent and continuous curriculum.

There was some evidence of P1 teachers collaborating with each other and using information in transition records to plan children's learning experiences which took account of children's prior learning and interests on entry to school. |
| **3: When children were able to influence curriculum content, the 'early level' activities were more relevant and motivating. (RQ1)** | Children in nursery regularly influenced the content of the nursery 'early level' curriculum. Practitioners' use of floorbooks and regular meaningful dialogue with children helped maintain a balance between a responsive and an imposed curriculum.

In P1, children seemed less involved in determining curriculum content. Their ability to exercise agency over what and how they learn was limited. |
| **4: There were significant pedagogical differences between the two 'early** | Practitioners adopted play-based pedagogies where children's interests were the main focus of interactions and planned activities. |

level' (traditions). (RQ1)	
	P1 teachers adopted goal-oriented teaching approaches with some play-based pedagogy.
5: Parents supported their children's curriculum transition to school in several ways. They drew on their own social capital to ease their child's transition to school. (RQ2)	Parents devoted time to their child to help them feel emotionally secure and happy about the move to school. They engaged in priming events in order to be informed of the rules and routines in school. Parents viewed the induction events as a way of finding out about what the 'school day' expected of their child. They supported their child by adhering to expectations such as buying uniform and school bags. Parents expected their child to learn through adult-directed teaching in P1 and have less time to learn through play-based pedagogy.
6: As children moved between the two 'early level' traditions they experienced a change in the way they learned and a shift in their agency and social capital. (RQ3)	As children move to school, they have fewer opportunities to exercise agency as a result of the environmental and cultural influences within the 'P1 early level'. Through time, they adjusted to these cultural differences, conforming to institutional expectations. In P1, children relinquished control of their learning to the teacher, to the routines and norms of the school day. By drawing on their resources, children learned to cope with and adjust to the demands of the P1 environment, their collective social capital increased as they entered a unified space.

Table 8-Six key findings

8.2   Discussion of findings

In Chapters 6 and 7, I reported that two 'early level' traditions existed. Each tradition differed in terms of their ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 9). In addition, within each tradition there were structures relating to culture, planning, and pedagogical and teaching approaches which represent the well-established cultural characteristics of the ELC and primary school sectors. A tradition is a way of operating that is deeply embedded within the

culture of each sector of education. I propose that each 'early level' tradition is shaped from within by the sociocultural norms, by the behaviours, attitudes and identities, by the differences between the nursery microsystem and the primary school microsystem, thus creating a disconnect, a tension between the traditions. This study has highlighted these tensions. Ackesjö places the 'preschool class in Sweden in a borderland-an arena between two tradition-bound institutions' (2014: 3). Parallels can be drawn with Ackesjö's study, which has identified similar 'borderlands' or 'spaces' which I have discovered exist between the nursery 'early level' tradition and the P1 'early level' tradition.

I will now discuss the six key findings in more detail in the following three sub-sections.

8.2.1   Research question 1: How do practitioners and teachers in two Scottish ELC settings and three associated primary schools ensure curriculum continuity and progression in children's learning across the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level?

Finding one: Variations in how practitioners and P1 teachers planned the 'early level' influenced continuity or discontinuity in the 'early level' curriculum and in children's learning experiences.

This study has found that one of the barriers to achieving continuity across the 'early level' curriculum is the way in which the 'early level' is planned and implemented by those with responsibility for curriculum planning, learning

and teaching in each tradition. Barr and Borkett (2015) assert we need to bridge or connect opposing cultures and environments.

While the content of the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence in both the nursery tradition and the P1 tradition are generally well understood, I have shown they mean different things to different people resulting in discontinuity in the curriculum and in children's learning. By connecting the two traditions, it should be possible to open up a third space that allows for negotiation. The challenge is to make meaning and hybridity, that is the production of new forms of cultural dialogue between the participants in each tradition, further reinforcing the need to connect the contested planning and pedagogical approaches which are evident between the 'early level' traditions (Burns, 2018). In its report on Curriculum for Excellence the OECD called for strengthened engagement and boldness from schools, teachers and others in delivering the full implementation of a 'dynamic, highly equitable curriculum' (2015:11).

The finding above shows there is scope for greater professional collaboration, development and interconnections across the traditions, particularly with regard to planning curriculum content. Bronfenbrenner's triad principle is relevant here, 'N+2 systems' where 'N' is the 'early level' and the two systems are the nursery tradition and the P1 tradition (1979:5) . Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that in order for development to occur in either 'system', reciprocal relationships need to be effective. The two 'early level' traditions need to have linkages, which depend on closer participation,

communication and the existence of information in each setting about the other.

Some of the practitioners in this study demonstrated collaborative working, a 'unified' approach to planning the 'early level' curriculum. In the playrooms observed, practitioners said they worked in teams within and across one or even two playrooms where the discourse was focussed on the child and their interaction and engagement with the environment around them. The practitioners I observed, appeared responsive to children's immediate interests, curiosities and motivations. In both settings, the practitioners shared information with each other informally during their daily activities and more formally at planning meetings. They used oral and written observations of children's learning and specific personal knowledge of individual children to shape short term curriculum plans. In so doing, the 'early level' curriculum experience at nursery was predominantly child-centred, responsive and relevant to children.

Finding two: **Where there was frequent dialogue and collaboration between practitioners as well as between P1 teachers and with parents, the 'early level' curriculum activities took greater account of children's prior learning.**

In this study, the teachers were consistent in their attitudes to the transition information they received from practitioners. They generally trusted and respected the transition information they received from practitioners which took the form of personal profiles, learning journals and transition reports.

Teachers had opportunities for dialogue with practitioners at times throughout the year to share information on children's progress and to work together on similar themes and topics. There were however, some inconsistencies in the way in which the information was used by teachers to plan the 'early level' curriculum in P1, more specifically, to determine curriculum content, to plan lessons and to set children tasks and activities. Ackesjö contends that, unless teachers have a common understanding of what has gone before and recognise children's achievements then 'it is difficult to create continuity between the school settings' (2013:16).

In all three primary schools, I observed occasions when children repeated activities and revisited skills they had experienced and acquired in nursery. In Chapter 6, I described how Belle who had been playing a game of snap, reflected on her mastery of numbers to ten *'yes' 'I was good in the nursery too'*. Belle recognised her own strengths as a learner, she also knew she was skilled in counting beyond ten but passively accepted that she had to play the game. Bronfenbrenner offered advice on just such a situation:

> 'if we know a child has had sufficient opportunity to observe and acquire a behavioral sequence, and we know he [sic] is physically capable of performing the act but does not do so, then it is reasonable to assume that it is motivation which is lacking. The appropriate countermeasure then involves increasing the subjective value of the desired act relative to any competing response tendencies he might have, rather than having the model senselessly repeat an already

redundant sequence of behavior' (ibid,1979: 67).

Some of the tasks and activities P1 teachers planned for children lacked relevance and purpose. The content of curriculum plans did not build progressively or coherently on children's existing skills, attributes or capabilities. Teachers appeared to be part of a culture and a compulsory school regime where internal pressures to deliver tightly structured curriculum programmes of study were evident. Teachers felt pressured to ensure children achieved nationally agreed attainment targets. Such an approach challenged the ideal of an educational process or curriculum centred on the child, and their interaction with the world around them (Bruner, 1971).

Margetts (2014) asserts that transition to school programmes need to take account of the factors which impact on children's ability to adjust to school. One key factor, according to Margetts, is that of 'programme continuity through developmentally appropriate curricula' (2002:106). By carefully planning for curriculum continuity, children are more likely to be successful, not just in their first year in school, but throughout their schooling. And the ways in which those responsible for designing, planning and implementing the curriculum, are important in terms of children's opportunity to engage in learning activities that are meaningful, purposeful and progressive.

In Scotland, government policy dictates that local authorities provide evidence on how well children are attaining across the Curriculum for Excellence levels. By adhering to national policy, local authorities indirectly

exert an external force (the exosystem) on the child and the curriculum they experience. And at the microsystem level, schools must provide attainment data to their local authority and the government that evidences children's progress in learning in key areas of the curriculum. The recent introduction of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments has placed further pressure on schools to show that children are making progress across the 'early level' and that they experience an appropriate balance of learning across all eight curriculum areas (Scottish Government, 2017c).

In this study, teachers sometimes worked with a 'stage partner' to plan curriculum content and to devise assessment activities. The nature of their collaboration was however, different to the curriculum planning and assessment practices observed in the nursery tradition. Teachers used the same words, for example, 'collegiate planning', and 'informal assessment'. In reality, in the P1 'early level' tradition teachers planned and assessed learning that was influenced by goal-oriented programmes of study or commercially produced programmes for each curriculum area compared with the planning approaches adopted by practitioners, which predominantly focused on being responsive to children's immediate needs and curiosities.

With regard to children's progress in attaining the 'early level', findings from a study by Dufer *et al.*, concur with theorists such as Coleman (1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1994) who pointed to social capital as being a supportive construct that influences how well children achieve. Furthermore, Dufer *et al.* claim that the social capital derived from the home if invested wisely has more value than

that derived in school, however, taken together social capital can be 'influential in promoting children's academic achievement' (2013:2). The significance for this study, is that it is widely accepted that social capital inheres in social relationships among individuals as well as in groups. This study has found that where relationships and collaboration were strong among the 'actors' then the 'nursery early level' curriculum offer was better planned by practitioners and therefore more empowering of children's agency and social capital. The collaborative working approaches found in the nursery tradition were built on trusting relationships that grew over time through face-to-face contact, which then forged links, ties to the children and their parents, creating social capital which in turn has value for the child. However, the existence of these collaborations alone is not enough to generate a useful transfer of knowledge (Coleman, 1988), there needs to be a conscious investment in building social capital by all those concerned with educating the child.

This study has shown that P1 teachers did collaborate, though not as regularly or in the same way as their practitioner colleagues. Teachers had positive relationships with each other and with children and their parents. However, the structures that exist in primary schools get in the way of connecting teachers and parents, of building social relationships that arguably in the nursery tradition generated 'bonding and bridging' social capital (Putnam, 2000) between practitioners and between them and parents. Another factor that constrained collaboration and parental partnerships in the P1 tradition was the absence of daily contact with parents and carers, for

example, dropping the child off at the school gate minimised opportunities for teachers to bond with parents in ways that might generate social capital, to enhance curriculum continuity and improve children's learning outcomes.

Broström (2002b) suggests the lack of collaboration is down to poor communication between nursery and school. I found that there were weaknesses in communication and collaboration, and this exposed children to a curriculum that was disjointed. Opening up possibilities for joint planning and collaboration systems between the two 'early level' traditions could support the bridging of contested practices. I have suggested that greater collaboration across the traditions is needed to address the issues of curriculum and pedagogical discontinuity that currently prevail and are oft reported in inspection reports from Education Scotland. The OECD (2015) report, Improving Schools in Scotland called for 'clarity about the kinds of collaboration that work best to bring about innovations and improvements to enhance student learning, and to create coherent and cohesive cultures of system-wide collaboration' (2015:19).

Finding three: When children were able to influence curriculum content, the 'early level' activities were more relevant and motivating.

I observed practitioners in the study inviting children to give their views and opinions when determining the direction of a future theme or topic. Children frequently shared with practitioners their ideas and desires for particular resources, toys and equipment. Although, children were familiar with where in the environment they could find favourite books, toys and materials, they would ask for certain items from storage cupboards. Practitioners were

responsive to these requests and would involve the child in locating the requested resource. When children wanted to learn more about a topic, practitioners used floor books to explore the child's current knowledge and to record what they wanted to know next. Children wrote, drew, stuck pictures in the floor books, they were actively constructing, planning their own curriculum. According to Bronfenbrenner 'active engagement in, or even mere exposure to, what others are doing often inspires the person to undertake similar activities on her own', (1979:6).

The practitioners in this study, responded to children's immediate interests, their motivations, their requests for information and when they needed support to master a new skill or concept. (Rogoff, 1990). By adopting a responsive approach to planning the 'early level' curriculum in the nursery, practitioners built on children's funds of knowledge (Kitson, 2010, Peters, 2015) and valued their individual and collective social capital, in effect customising the curriculum to reflect the unique context of the setting. In addition, the developmental needs of each child were foregrounded in practitioners' conversations. However, as evidenced by data from playroom observations, there were times when practitioners' interactions were less successful in meeting children's learning needs.

Finding four: There were significant pedagogical differences between the two traditions of the 'early level'.

Clear pedagogical differences between the traditions emerged. The data shows that the practitioners in the two nursery settings avoided the use of

formal, inflexible didactic pedagogical approaches. They defended strongly their use of play-based pedagogy. Further they resisted any demands from external sources to adopt rigid curriculum structures that failed in their opinion to support the needs, motivations and interests of the children in their setting. It is well known that young children learn best when they learn through play, play that is intrinsically motivated and determined by children (Moyles, 2010; Fisher, 2013). Broström (2002a) and Fisher (2013) support the existence of a responsive, reflexive curriculum, arguing that a child-centred curriculum best serves young children's stages of development.

The pedagogy or more accurately, teaching approaches used by the teachers in the four P1 classes differed from the pedagogy children experienced in the nursery 'early level' tradition. It appears that while there may well be a shifting of minds nationally, with regard to play-based methodologies, these approaches were not transferring across the two 'early level' traditions as effectively as they could or should be. The pedagogical practice found in the nursery 'early level' tradition conflicted with the teaching approaches employed in the P1 'early level' tradition. One pedagogical tradition was rooted in play while the other tradition reflected a traditional teaching approach where play was generally reserved for break times. This fact was recognised by the children in this study, as Hamish protested not long after starting school that 'there is no dirt [mud] to play with in primary 1' (Hamish, aged 4).

More recently however, education authorities across Scotland have been actively promoting play-based pedagogy at the early stages in primary schools (Education Scotland, 2014). Many practitioners and teachers have embraced offers to attend cross-sectoral professional learning events which aim to 'build strong and equal partnerships between ECEC settings and schools…through collaborative learning environments' (Moss, 2013; OECD, 2017:205). According to the OECD, the creation of collaborative professional learning partnerships provide a platform for an exchange of ideas and practices across sectors. Such collaboration could resolve 'the unequal relationships between ECEC staff and primary school teachers' (OECD, 2017: 205). The findings from this study have shown that there is still headroom for improvement in realising play as pedagogy across the 'early level' traditions.

8.2.2 Research question 2: What do parents do to support their child as they transition across the 'early level' curriculum from nursery to P1?

Finding five: Parents supported their children's curriculum transition to school in several ways. They drew on their own social capital to ease their child's transition to school.

In the context of this study, parents were socially connected to the nursery settings. The aspect they valued most was receiving daily feedback, two way communication which told them about their child's day. Parents used their network of connections to empower them to work with practitioners to support

their child's transition to school. The findings from the OECD (2017) report, Starting Strong V: Transitions From Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education state that 'strong collaboration among all actors involved in children's early development is key for successful transitions: these include children, parents, ECEC and primary school teachers and professionals of community services' (2017:204). In the nursery tradition, I found parents demonstrated a sharing of power with practitioners. In line with Bourdieu's notion of capital, parents accrued social capital through their interactions with practitioners. Several authors note that where parents support their child during the transition process, including 'defining children's learning programmes' children's transition to school is more successful (Westcott, *et al*., 2003; Dockett and Perry, 2004; OECD, 2017).

Parents noted that by the time the child had started school, they did not have day to day involvement with teachers and their participation in activities such as contributing to curriculum content was minimal. Partly because of ecological factors, which resulted from the move from one microsystem to another. Parents expected the school environment to present challenges for their child and themselves. Having previously been confident about their role as a co-contributor to their child's learning, parents stated they were less likely to get involved in school life or indeed have the confidence to offer their skills or opinions to teachers. They perceived that teachers should decide what their child should learn, that teachers held the knowledge and necessary expertise, particularly when planning and deciding curriculum content.

During the weeks prior to leaving nursery, parents continued to support their child's transition process, however, there was a philosophical shift in the nature of their support. This shift was due in part to a realisation that the 'ecological transition' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 6) demanded a new role for them as parents and therefore they needed to adapt how they supported their child. Parents embraced opportunities to attend induction events and workshops where they were given information or learned what was expected of them as parents, for example, homework featured as an area that they were required to support. The OECD asserts that international data demonstrates that parents have more involvement with practitioners in nursery settings (93%) than with teachers in school (70%) (2017: 204). Interestingly, the specific involvement of parents in this study, support this OECD claim.

As is clear from these findings, socioecological differences between the two traditions existed. In the nursery tradition, parents talked about their regular engagement with practitioners. In particular, they commented on the information they received on a daily basis about their child's progress in learning. In the P1 tradition, the relationship no longer felt like an equal partnership to parents. Parents regretted the loss of frequent connection to the nursery tradition though they rationalised the lack of opportunity to be involved in the P1 tradition was simply because teachers had more children to look after and the structure of the school day wasn't conducive to informal exchanges of information. They engaged in school activities when invited to take part.

The social environment of the immediate microsystem empowered the parents to draw positively on their dispositions and resources to engage with the practitioners (Peters, 2015) as a means of supporting their child's social and emotional wellbeing.

During their time as the parent of a 'nursery child', the parents engaged with the practitioners in the co-construction of meanings. These strong relational bonds and connections were established over time. As a consequence of the familiarity and recognition of each other's role in relation to the child, it was clear that the parents in this study valued the support they received from practitioners.

The relationships parents had with P1 teachers were positive, respectful and trusting. However, the data demonstrated that parents felt less confident about working alongside P1 teachers during the months prior to their child starting school.

Karila and Rantavuouri in examining the literature on the institutional variances between boundaries noted the 'cultural and historical roots of institutional practices play a significant role when building relationships', (2014:380)

It was clear that parents had less involvement and communication with the teachers than they previously experienced with the practitioners in the nursery. Schools are powerful institutions (Johansson, 2002). The findings identified a dynamic shift in the kind of relationships parents developed with the school. Griebel and Niesal assert that 'changes in identity' are to be

expected but not always recognised by parents at first during the transitions process as they themselves 'bit by bit' come to terms with their new identity and relations as parents of a school child' (2009: 61).

In shifting their position to become the parents of a 'school child', fewer opportunities were available for parents to engage with the teachers in sharing experiences; to co-construct meanings. Neuman (2002) suggests that much of this is down to the 'structural divisions' that exist. These divisions include different attitudes, beliefs and a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. Griebel and Niesel claim that effective communication is vital for transition to be successful, that there needs to be a 'shared dialogue' between the teacher and the parents (2002:29). In this study, despite the apparent lack of confidence of a few parents, they devoted significant amounts of time to supporting their child during this complex period of transition to school. The data indicated that while the child was in nursery, parents placed greater emphasis on their child's wellbeing and less emphasis on academic achievement. This view concurred with similar studies on children's adjustment to school (Ladd and Price, 1987; Howes, 1990; Ladd, 1990; Margetts, 2002; Shields, 2009).

In order to help their child adjust to the move to school, parents believed it was important to attend the induction programmes, the 'priming events' provided by the three receiving primary schools (Lago, 2014). As a result of attending induction meetings with teachers, parents learned about the structure of the school day, school rules, and how literacy and numeracy

would be taught. Parents valued the advice they received and used it to support their child. They worked at home helping their child gain early literacy and numeracy skills and when out shopping for example, they encouraged their child to count the pieces of fruit as they put them in the bag. They supported their child to practise writing their name, to choose a school bag and to understand the importance of behaving differently as a school child.

These actions reinforced the expectation that children will adjust to the culture of the classroom (Fabian, 2002). Adjustment to the rules and structures of school required the children to meet social and cultural norms, a view that is opposed by other authors (Ahtola, 2011; McNair, 2017). In a study, by Margetts (2002) she suggests that 'children's adjustment to school is influenced by a multiplicity of factors' (2002:121) Furthermore, that overcoming the discontinuity that transition creates is a factor in children's successful transition to school (Margetts, 2002, Hayes *et al.*, 2014).

The parents in this study, positioned themselves as receivers of information as cooperative contributors, they didn't challenge the school systems. Parents like their children, adjusted their behaviour and became upholders of the institutional norms and structures that they encountered in school. The language teachers used in their interview responses also suggested they expected parents to comply.

Margetts posits that parents should receive sufficient information and opportunities to understand the new environment and to share it with their

child' (2002: 107). On a similar theme, Ahtola (2011) asserts children should be surrounded by a 'web of relationships' where they are supported by all the actors, influencing each other to ease the child's transition to school, building a strong foundation on which to bring about continuity in their learning and development, (OECD, 2017). Thus, for this study, a mutual partnership built on well established relationships between teachers and parents was not always evident.

8.2.3 Research question 3: How is the continuity of children's learning, their agency and social capital affected by their transition across the 'early level' from nursery to P1?

Finding six: As children moved between the two traditions of the 'early level' they experienced a change in the way they learned and a shift in their agency and social capital.

Children exercised significant agency over their learning while in their nursery settings compared with the limited opportunities afforded them in their new role as a school child. In their study, Lam and Pollard inform us that children have the ability to take responsibility for their learning, that they are 'active, creative and strategic practitioners' (2006:124). In the context of this study, the environmental features of the nursery settings empowered the children to make decisions about what they wanted to explore, to question, to interact with or to simply observe from the side lines of the playroom or outdoor spaces. The children spent much of their time each day, particularly those who attended Mistletoe Nursery, independently determining their learning

pathways. The practitioners in Mistletoe Nursery facilitated children's learning, they embraced the child's interests by being responsive to a provocation, an enquiry or a request for information. The children in Bluebell NC had similar experiences, though they were exposed to more structured adult-directed activity. With regard to the P1 tradition, children's power as newcomers within a community, sat with the teacher as the decision maker. The structural framework of the P1 timetable, imposed inflexible routines governed by bell-ringing to signify the beginning and end of a period of instruction, of learning activities, of breaks for playtime and lunchtime and home time. Children had no say in these matters.

According to Dewey (1974), all learning is influenced by previous experiences. While there was the potential for children to embrace the sociocultural differences between traditions, Ackesjö (2014) suggests children as learners are exposed to many challenges as they cross borders from one environment to another. These challenges include, changes in their identity; a reshaping of who they are (Fabian and Dunlop, 2002; Dunlop, 2018). Children are expected to draw on their social and emotional capital to adjust to periods of discontinuity, to changing expectations of themselves as learners by parents and teachers (McGonigal *et al*., 2007). In adjusting to the rhythms of school they use and develop new forms of agency (Lam and Pollard, 2006). There are times when children are empowered and then disempowered as learners when they realise they are no longer 'experts' but 'apprentices' participating in a new world (Rogoff, 2003). All of these

elements according to Akkerman and Bakker 'carry learning potential' (2011:132).

When applied to this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model brings into focus the variant nature of the activities, roles and relationships experienced by the children while positioned as expert learners in the nursery 'early level' tradition compared with their position in the P1 tradition. As a result of their transition to school, not only did the child's ecological environment change, but also their position in terms of status. Jindel-Snape and Miller (2010) perceive the child's move to school as one of stepping down, from expert to novice. Similarly, their ability to have a genuine involvement in determining the content of the curriculum, in crossing from one tradition to the other, the 'experts' often lost not only status but also power to choose, to influence curriculum content and ways of learning that best suit them as learners.

As 'border crossers' (Peters, 2015), children in this study had a clear understanding of the rules of the border crossing game. By participating in a series of 'priming events' (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000, Corsaro, 2003; Lago, 2014) in the months prior to starting school, children gradually relinquished the type of agency afforded them in the nursery tradition. At nursery, they regularly made decisions about how to learn, to problem solve, to select resources to support their play. In P1, children found themselves in a contested space where they had to compromise their position as an agentic child to comply with the rules of the game. Rituals associated with the rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960) into school were reinforced again at home by

parents keen to ensure the wellbeing and safe passage of their child into their first year at school.

While preparing children and their parents for school are considered important priming elements for ensuring children experience a settled start in school (Broström, 2002a; Peters, 2015), it was also clear that by imposing the institutional expectations of the school on children, opportunities to exercise agency are lost or at best reduced (Margetts, 2002; Fisher, 2009). This finding raises a key consideration for the thrust of this study, achieving curriculum continuity across the 'early level'. The central tenant of the 'early level' is that it is a child-centred curriculum, one that is socially constructed responding to the unique context that each child inhabits. The processes involved in the planning and delivery of the 'early level' curriculum that the child experiences need to alter and not the child in transition.

8.3   Chapter conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to present and discuss the six key findings in relation to the three research questions. I have demonstrated that the planning and teaching approaches in the school tradition were not always flexible enough to build on the knowledge and skills children brought with them from home and from nursery. I have argued for greater collaboration between practitioners and P1 teachers, and that a more reflexive pedagogical approach is required if children are to be appropriately supported as learners.

Parents in this study rationalised the ecological and sociocultural differences which exist between nursery and P1 as a consequence of 'moving on'. They anticipated their child would experience emotional discontinuity and discontinuity with regard to what and how their child would learn in the P1 environment. Parents dealt with these periods of discontinuity by being part of the transition process. A few parents welcomed the changes, expressing the need for greater cognitive challenge for their child, while others were apprehensive, concerned their child would struggle with the constraints of the school day. There was a consensus between the parents that they did want their child to settle quickly into the routines and structures of school. It was also clear that the depth of knowledge the parents possess of their child as a learner is significant and this needs to be acknowledged and valued. Each parent was acutely aware of the social and emotional wellbeing needs of their child and what they as parents needed to do to support them during this complex period in their lives which according to Lago (2014) must be made sense of.

And finally, I have found that two 'early level' traditions exist. Drawing on van Gennep's (1960) notion of rites of passage, children moved between the two traditions, where they are 'betwixt and between' phases of transformation. I suggest that, as children move between the two 'early level' traditions they encounter 'contested' and 'unified' spaces which I will elaborate on in the final chapter. In these spaces, children learn over time to adjust to new ways of being (Burns, 2018).

Chapter 9: Conclusions: The emergence of contested and unified spaces between two 'early level' traditions: problematising children's learning, agency and social capital

Introduction

This thesis began by looking at the problem of achieving curriculum continuity for children starting school. It explored the extent to which practitioners in two early learning and childcare settings and P1 teachers in three primary schools achieve continuity across the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence. This study explored practitioners' and teachers' views of the barriers and challenges they face in implementing and delivering the 'early level'. Parents' views were also sought on how they support their child's curriculum transition. This final chapter begins by conceptualising some higher-level findings which emerged beyond the initial aim of this study. I will show that the 'contested and unified' spaces are strongly associated with each of the six key findings presented in Chapter 8. As with any study, there are limitations, and these are considered here. In the final section, the two main conclusions are set out alongside strategic and practical recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and teachers and for future research.

9.1   The emergence of contested and unified spaces

The findings from this study show that the transition to primary school inevitably creates a period of discontinuity for the child and their parents as they adjust to the demands of a different environment, or microsystem. The child leaving the familiarity of their nursery encounters change as they move

between the nursery and the school microsystem. An ecological transition occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which brings changes to the child's environment, and socially and cultural, to their identity and status (Karikoski, 2008) as a result of transitioning across the 'early level' curriculum and of the pedagogical practices they experience in school

In Chapter 1, I described how the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence Early Level was created to help address issues associated with curriculum discontinuity (Scottish Government, 2006). This study argues that practitioners and teachers now have access to a curriculum model that makes possible a continuous learning experience for children transitioning from nursery to primary school. However, this study has identified that children experience two 'early level' traditions. Furthermore, I conclude that between these two 'early level' traditions, there exists a '*contested space'* and a *'unified space'*. Figure 9 below illustrates this conclusion.
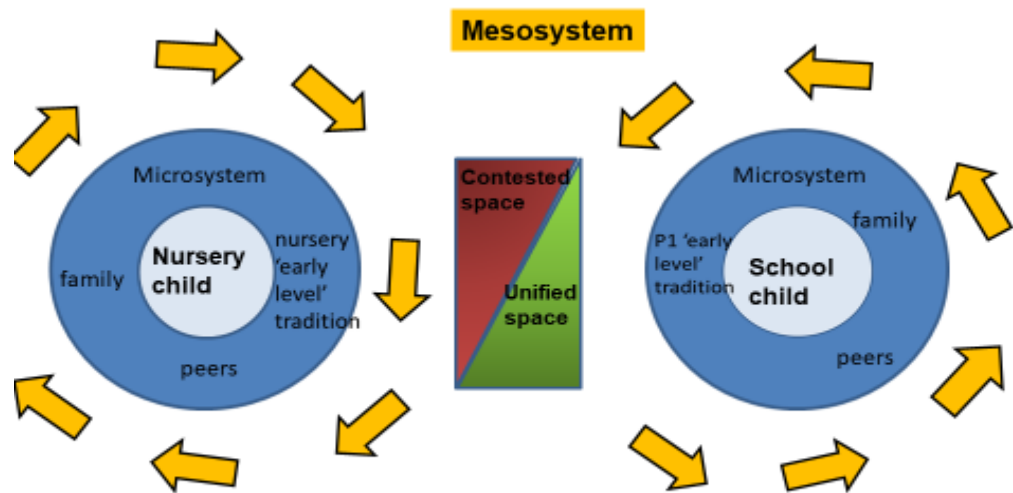
Figure 9-Contested and unified spaces between the two 'early level traditions

9.1.1 Defining the contested space

Conceptually, the contested space is the space which the children in this study step into and out again as they move between the two 'early level' traditions. The findings from this study show the contested space is permeable, it is also not fixed. It is contested because it combines the sociocultural elements with the 'institutional practices' of the nursery and school microsystems which children in this study inhabit (Karila and Rantavuori, 2014:379). It is in this space that the nursery 'early level' tradition loses its child-centredness, responsiveness and focus on play-based learning.

The contested space is where elements of the P1 'early level' tradition, such as goal-oriented learning are imposed, thus restricting children's freedom and choice, and their ability to exercise agency over how they learn, requiring

them to draw on their capital assets (Bourdieu, 1985) to support them as they position themselves in the contested space. Moss (2013) refers to this as 'schoolification'. It is also the space where the child experiences a shift in the dynamics of friendships with peers and relationships with adults. They encounter pedagogical practices that impact on how they are taught, what they will learn and how they will interact socially with their teachers.

The contested space is where the child's ability to have control over where they play, to make decisions about how long they want to play, who they will play with and not. The contested space looks and feels different. It is the space where children are expected to let go of their cultural understandings of the routines and norms of the nursery tradition whilst coping with the demands placed on them to learn institutional, school practices. It is the space where children learn to conform to new 'activity systems' (Edwards, 2011). They can no longer position themselves to opt-in and out of systems and practices as and when they choose, as they are faced with new rules to be adhered to (McNair, 2016).

From an interpretivist position, the findings from this study show that each child experiences the contested space differently, depending on their personal characteristics, their home environment, their coping and social adjustment strategies (Kienig, 2002). I suggest the contested space is where there is the potential for kick-back, for non-conforming behaviours and emotional upset to manifest itself in the relationships children have with each other, with their parents, practitioners and teachers. Some children entering

the contested space face periods of uncertainty which may require targeted support to ensure they can access with confidence the unified space.

9.1.2 Defining the unified space

The unified space offers sameness and continuity. In the unified space, some things look and feel familiar to children. The unified space permits children to make choices about the kind of learning activities and resources they engage with, to influence the content of the curriculum and to have permission to learn through play. This unified approach exists as a result of the practitioners and P1 teachers collaborating over the design and layout of the P1 classroom to retain familiar elements of the look and feel of children's nursery experience. Thereby, offering the children ecological and institutional commonalities in meanings systems and practices (Karila and Rantavuori, 2014). For example, children in Mistletoe PS were afforded an opportunity to have a say in what they would learn in school by making a contribution to planning a bridging topic using floor books. In this example of a unified space, the P1 teacher offered the children ownership of their learning.

The unified space has the potential to shape 'the substance of the curriculum' (Dunlop, 2018:212) and while it can be unsettling and confusing for some children to experience discontinuity, children expect difference but not in a way that leaves them feeling exposed, inadequate or lacking in confidence. The unified space provides the context in which the future direction, culture

and content of the 'early level' could be shaped 'children do not stand still, nor should they, nor should policy and practice' (Dunlop, 2018: 212).

The unified space opens up possibilities and opportunities for practitioners and teachers to bridge the two 'early level' traditions. Peters (2014) notes that the key to successfully crossing boundaries lies in creating shared understandings. In the unified space, there are possibilities for children to be empowered to 'assert their agency', (Hoggett, 2001: 49) to act as agents for change.

In relation to this study's theoretical framework, the chronosystem element of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model shows that the impact of life events will alter over time (see Chapter 4, Figure 1). For the children in this study, the contested space was not fixed, it faded as they gained confidence and adjusted to the P1 'early level' tradition, conceptually, they moved into a growing and strengthening unified space. Similarly, their parents adjusted 'ecologically' by demonstrating behaviours which embraced the different environmental and cultural constructions; adhering to school rules, buying school bags, supporting homework tasks, attending priming events, all in an effort to mitigate against any adverse impact of the contested space on their child. For both child and parent, over time the contested space diminishes, the unified space increases before flowing into the mesosystem which connects the two 'early level' traditions. I liken this to Wacquant's perception of Bourdieu's concept of 'field' and 'they [spaces] can arise, grow, change shape, and sometimes wane or perish over time' (2007:268). This

conceptualisation is illustrated in Figure 10 below; it shows the child in transition passing from the nursery 'early level' tradition through the contested space which reduces over time as they learn to adjust to the P1 'early level' tradition, thereby entering an increasingly unified space.
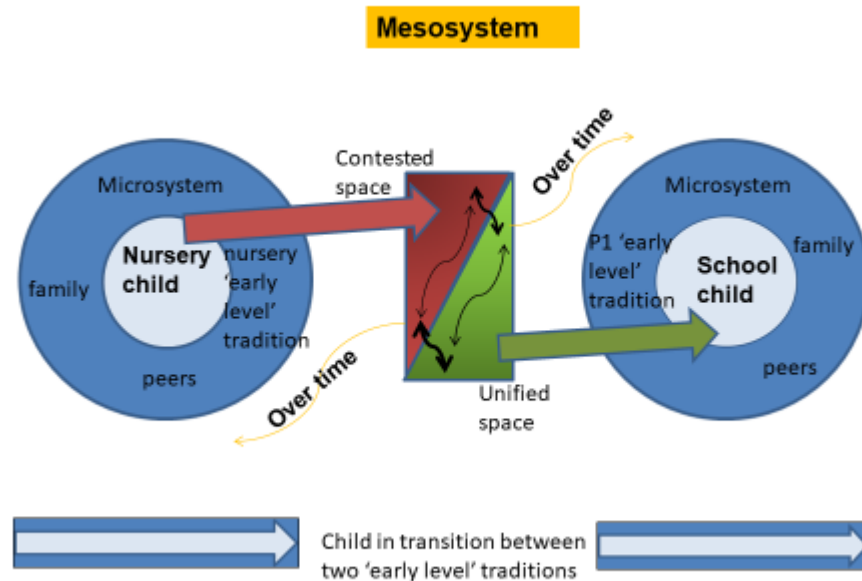
Figure 10-Moving between two traditions through contested and unified spaces

9.1.3 Playing the 'field'-children shifting positions in and between the contested and unified spaces

The findings from the two cases in this transitions study have shown the ways in which the concept of social capital can be 'transitory' (Cross *et al*, 2012: 15) By drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of 'social capital' and 'field', I was able to explore children's changing position or status in the 'contested' and 'unified' spaces (1985). Bathmaker claims Bourdieu's concept of 'field' is 'a particular social space that involves a network or configuration of relations between positions' (2015:65). Further she argues that the concept is used 'to

make sense of the differentiated nature of social space in advanced societies' (Bathmaker, 2015:65). Children moving between the two 'early level' traditions hold transitory positions in both fields, the 'contested' field and the 'unified' field or space. How long they spend in each space will depend on factors such as the durability of children's social and cultural assets (Allan and Catts, 2012). McGonigal *et al*. note that children are 'highly competent at moving between networks of their own friends and acquaintances, the informal and formal networks of [nursery] school and between home and school' (2007:90).

Within the microsystem where the nursery 'early level' tradition is situated, the children in this study already held positions within an established network. The challenge for each child was to make sense of their new networks, while sustaining old ones as they pass through the contested and unified spaces before becoming full team members of the P1 'early level' tradition. This was a position the child assumed unconsciously, largely unaware of their conformity to the P1 'early level' tradition and the adjustments they had made to their ways of being, their *identity*. By the time the October school break came along, I posit that almost all of them had accepted the rhythms and norms of the school day, to become 'school children'.

Over time, the children in this study learned the rules embedded in the culture of each tradition. They behaved socially in ways that defined them as

individuals, responding to the culture of the P1 'early level' tradition either conforming to the rules and structures or challenging and resisting them.

The children exercised agency 'actions, decisions and behaviours' (Hoggett, 2001: 52), that Deacon and Mann define as representing 'some measure of meaningful choice' (1999:413). Links are often made between agency and choice, the concept of choice suggesting 'a freely choosing individual actor somehow or other disembedded from social relations and networks in which they are immersed' (Hoggett, 2001, 52). And by so doing, we are, according to Hoggett in danger of undermining the concept of agency, rather we should associate it with change and not choice. For each child, the amount of change or loss of agency that they experienced varied. Similarly, the impact on the individual child's accrued social capital. Figure 11 below offers a 'bioecological/sociocultural' model which illustrates conceptually, the changes in children's agency and social capital as they transition through the contested and unified space. Inherent in each child is their ability to draw and build on their existing social capital, in order to bridge the spaces between the nursery 'early level' tradition and the P1 'early level' tradition and how over time they consolidate their new positions.
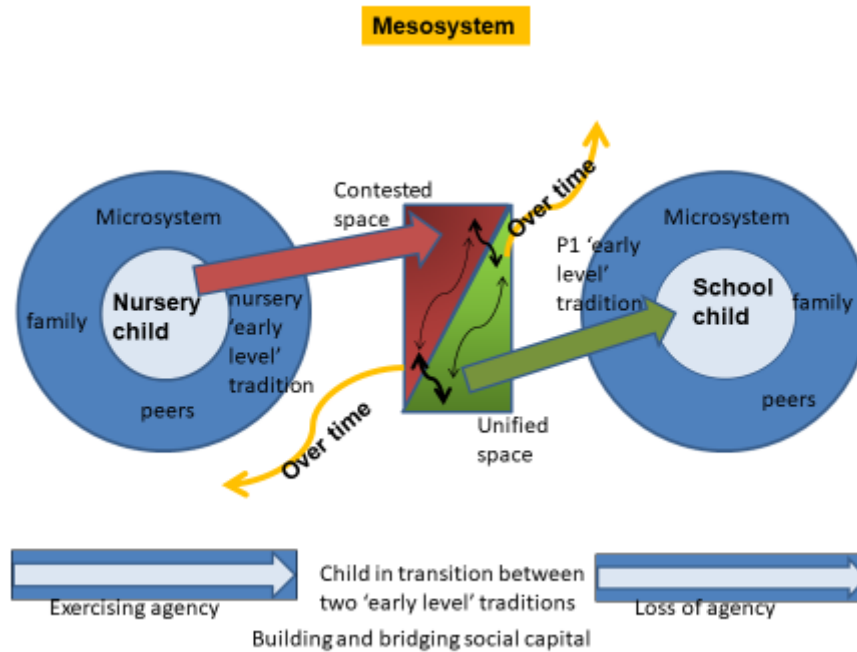
Figure 11-Bioecological/sociocultural model version 2: transitioning between contested and unified spaces

In this study, change in agency is reflected in the child's responsiveness to adjustment and reflexivity, relying on their coping strategies in the 'contested' space where the opportunities to exercise choice are constrained by the rules of the game. Bathmaker, suggests that 'what positions agents within a field is the possession of capital and power that is relevant to the purposes of a particular field (2015:66). Further that 'positions in the field then produce in agents particular ways of thinking, being and doing' and as this study has identified, as a school child, their 'agency' is influenced by 'external others' (2015: 66).

According to Field (2017), social capital is all about relationships and the ties, the bonds children have with their peers, parents, and other members of the community in the microsystem in which they operate. Durkheim's (1984)

view is that social connections help to unify society. Children spend several years in nursery, forging relationships, connecting with peers, establishing attachments to key workers. These relational ties are strong and in loosening them after transition children's social capital is temporarily weakened. Just how much they are weakened will depend on the quality and sufficiency of capital resources the child has at their disposal to navigate their way through the contested space and into the unified space.

Bourdieu raises some concerns about equal access to resources. Bronfenbrenner views these resources as 'dispositions' or 'assets' (Hayes *et al.*, 2017: 20). The children in this study were able to draw on their own resources and that of their parents and wide family networks, their 'personal connections' (Field, 2017:3). Others may not be so well-connected as they encounter the 'contested' space during the curriculum transition process. For the child entering the 'contested' space then, demands are made on their individual social capital. In this study, when positioned alongside friends, and 'like-minded peers' children sometimes combined resources in a way that increased their collective capital, bridging capital for a desired outcome.

McGonigal *et al.*(2007) detail how the children's social capital becomes active, is made real for them as individuals at a 'metacognitive level through awareness of purposeful learning habits and personal learning style' (2007: 89). As over time, children become familiar with the teacher's expectations, with the rhythms of the school day, until the space no longer feels contested, a sense of normal, familiarity takes over to become a unified space in which

the child's social capital alters, it grows and a shift in the child's identity occurs. This shift is not without a level of resistance, as demonstrated by some children in this study. In the unified space, the child must feel empowered, to voice the truth, as hooks puts it 'coming to voice is an act of resistance' (1989, 12). In so doing, there may be a loss of or change in agency as the child compromises their position in the field.

Bruner asserts 'we need to conceive of ourselves as agents impelled by self-generated intentions' and 'we see others in the same way…agency and collaboration need to be treated in the same way' (1996:92). From this study, collaboration between all the actors has emerged as a key finding for successfully connecting the two 'early level' traditions. The Scottish Government in developing Curriculum for Excellence intended that the 'early level' would solve a known and persistent problem, that of a disjointed curriculum experience for children starting school. The intention to achieve curriculum continuity has yet to be realised as the creators of Curriculum for Excellence overlooked the institutional and cultural gap that persists between the early learning and childcare sector and the primary school system in Scotland.

9.2   Limitations of the study

In any study there are limitations, which can be associated with the research approaches rendering the findings atypical and subject to challenge. Limitations include the choice of theoretical framework, aspects of the methodology, the specific settings selected and the sample size. From the

outset I intended to conduct an exploratory study which would allow me to consider the perspectives of the participants. By adopting an interpretivist position, I recognised it would not be possible to generalise the findings in relation to the wider population.

The use of observations and interviews proved to be an effective method for gathering a surprisingly large volume of data for analysis from a relatively small sample of participants. In future research, I would include methods that captured children's views of the curriculum they experience. Furthermore, following the same children over a longer timeframe, to the end of their first year in school, might have been beneficial in adding greater breadth and robustness to the data corpus, thereby, gaining a fuller understanding of the challenges and barriers associated with achieving curriculum continuity.

Ethically, I believed it was necessary to identify my position as a researcher with power and this aspect was never far from my mind throughout the fieldwork stages. (See Chapter 5, Section 5.4. and 5.6.) There is no doubt that holding such a position of power and influence needed to be acknowledged. Likewise, the extensive knowledge of and familiarity with the 'early level' curriculum inevitably supported the analysis of data and discussion of the findings. However, every effort was made throughout the study, to adopt a sensitive and impartial approach.

9.3 Implications and recommendations for policy and practice and future research

9.3.1 Implications for senior leaders and policy makers

The key conclusions from this study have strategic and operational implications for senor leaders, policy makers, practitioners and teachers. At a strategic level, senior leaders and policy makers need to:

- Demonstrate stronger strategic leadership and direction as advocates for play-based pedagogy in the early stages of primary schools. Furthermore, in both the ELC sector and the early stages of primary school to ensure there exists a solid and shared understanding of the value and importance of play, not just in theory but evident in practice as the vehicle which best supports young children's learning.

- Provide a clear rationale for the planning of the 'early level' and empower those with responsibility for its delivery to collaborate across the ELC sector and the early stages of primary school to plan a continuous curriculum experience for children aged three to six.

- Promote and encourage innovative practice which results in greater collaboration between practitioners in the early learning and childcare sector and teachers in the early stages of primary schools.

- Strengthen existing national and local early childhood policies to include a well-informed statement on the relevance of listening to children and hearing their voices as active agents in the co-production

of planning their 'early level' curriculum experiences and the environment in which they play and learn.

- Take action to address the 'leave them at the gate' approach to transition which still exists in some nursery to school induction policies and programmes. For example, by highlighting and promoting an equal partnership approach with parents, schools can be proactive in breaking down the institutionalised culture that is reinforced through *a doing to* rather than *a doing with* relationship at points of transition.

This study has shown that it is possible to create a 'unified space' for practitioners and teachers to meet, to share innovations, to challenge deeply held views about how young children learn and develop, and to realise that 'children grow and develop in the midst of society; the people, places, objects and ideas they encounter form the basis of their learning and development' (Hayes *et al.*, 2017:1).

9.3.2 Recommendations for practitioners and teachers

In order to break down the barriers and challenges of achieving curriculum continuity, practitioners and teachers need to engage with the 'contested' space. In agreement with Edwards (2011), it is recommended that practitioners and teachers 'work relationally' to recognise and value the resources that others possess in order to explore possibilities that will realise the original intention of the 'early level' of Curriculum for Excellence; that is an entitlement to curriculum continuity and progression in learning for children aged 3 to 6 years. In operational terms, this will involve practitioners

and teachers adopting a collaborative planning approach, actively exploring innovative and creative ways to work together as a team, to protect time for curriculum planning and to share pedagogical best practice that values the concept of 'play as pedagogy', across and within the two 'early level' traditions.

Likewise, there is scope for practitioners and teachers to think differently about how they involve children and their parents in transitions processes in an effort to minimise the effects of the 'contested' space on how children learn, exercise agency and build social capital. Dunlop (2018) describes the 'early level' as the *child's curriculum*, the what and how children learn as a direct result of their lived experiences, their relationships and interactions with others over time in the home, the nursery, school and the wider macrosystem. In designing 'early level' curriculum content, each setting or school should design a curriculum that reflects the *uniqueness* of the community it serves (Scottish Government, 2008b). Parents and children therefore should expect to be part of its creation and implementation. In order to achieve curriculum continuity, we need to learn more from our commonalities than our differences.

9.3.3 Implications for future research

This research has explored the barriers and challenges facing practitioners in two early learning and childcare settings and teachers in three primary schools, in achieving curriculum continuity and progression in children's learning across the Curriculum for Excellence 'early level'. The research

found that there were differences in the ways in which the 'early level' was planned and implemented by practitioners and teachers. Furthermore, that children in moving between the ELC sector and primary school experienced two 'early level' traditions which resulted in them entering contested and unified spaces that are conceptualised to exist in the mesosystem between the ELC microsystem and the school microsystem. Future research could explore how curriculum continuity is planned for and achieved in settings and schools that possess different socio-economic characteristics to those included in this study. For example, by conducting a larger scale study involving a number of settings and schools serving, for example, rural areas of Scotland, it may be possible to explore how and to what extent children's agency and social capital is affected as they encounter contested and unified spaces. Additionally, such a study may offer an insight into the logistical challenges facing practitioners and teachers in rural areas in developing partnerships in an effort to share practice and to plan for curriculum continuity across the 'early level'.

Another dimension in relation to the key findings of this research, would be to explore the challenges that practitioners working in the voluntary and private sector as providers of ELC, face in working collaboratively with associated schools in planning for curriculum continuity, a factor that was not an element of the present study.

Finally, this research focussed on the perspectives of the practitioners, teachers and parents of the thirteen children. Future research could include

the perspectives of the child in transition. The opportunity to design and conduct research which includes the views of children would be in keeping with participatory methods that are increasingly utilised by researchers of early childhood. Future research has the potential to explore how children respond to changes in their environment, how they learn and what they learn. Capturing and acting on children's views may influence the nature and design of early years pedagogy.

9.4   Contribution to knowledge and originality

In concluding this thesis, this study has provided an original contribution to the body of knowledge and ongoing discussions about the advantages of a continuous curriculum experience for children starting school. Two main conclusions have been identified. The first foregrounds the existence of two 'early level' curriculum traditions and the second shows that, between these two traditions, children in transition step between 'contested' and 'unified' spaces. Throughout this thesis, I have shown that both of these spaces are born out of the existence of the two 'early level' traditions, the 'nursery early level' tradition and the 'P1 early level' tradition. By acknowledging the influence of these spaces on the child's 'early level' curriculum experience, on their ability to exercise agency over their learning, and how in passing through the contested space the child draws on their social capital to adjust to the P1 tradition, I conclude that practitioners and teachers have an opportunity to collaborate in ways that offer possibilities to improve the planning, continuity and delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level for children starting school.

Hogsnes (2015) argues that continuity of experience ensures that children can apply learning from previous experiences in their new environment in school, and as Margetts (2002) suggests, to 'make sense' of the new surroundings. Discontinuity of experience has the potential to prevent children from finding common elements and reciprocal relationships between the two traditions (Dewey, 1916, 2005). Dunlop stresses that 'transitions research shows the importance of continuity into school to avoid the separation of the early learning and childcare sector from early primary education' (2018:224). If practitioners and P1 teachers continue to perpetuate the contested space between the 'early level' traditions across what Neuman (2002) refers to as 'institutional barriers' with culturally opposed expectations, then the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level conceived by policy-makers as a curriculum reform intent on developing continuity is in danger of faltering.

The challenge for me and others involved in the pursuit of continuity of curriculum experience is to ensure that continuity is improved. Individually and collectively, our role is to support quality and improvement in Scottish education and to strive to secure the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for all learners. Education Scotland's strategic objective of building a world class curriculum is ambitious, however realising a continuous 'early level' curriculum experience for all learners aged three to six is the challenge.

This study has highlighted that a continuous 'early level' is not yet reality, although it can be achieved if we recognise and challenge the existence of two 'early level' traditions. Personally, I will continue to promote a curriculum transition that minimises the child's exposure to the contested space and promotes continuity of experience within a unified 'early level' tradition.

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Appendices

**Appendix 1-Parental invitation to participate
letter and consent form**

Parent/Carer Information Sheet

Starting School: children's learning at transition to primary school

Thank you for expressing an interest in the above research project. Your contribution is extremely valued and important. My name is Marion Burns and I am studying at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. I would like to tell you a bit about the project I have invited you to take part in, which is part of my doctoral studies.

What is the purpose of this investigation/project?

The purpose of this project is to look at the ways in which educators in early years settings and primary school ensure children's smooth transition. I am also interested in how children and parents experience the curriculum at transition. I would like parents and children to share their views on transition and about the approaches used by staff to support your children's learning.

Do you have to take part?
I am inviting sixteen families to take part in the project. All participation is voluntary. No one is obliged to respond or do anything they do not want to. You and your child can withdraw at any time.

What will you do in the project?
If you decide to take part, you will be invited to take part in two short interviews. Each one will only take 15-20 minutes at a time and place that suits you, possibly your child's nursery/school. The first interview will be in June 2015 while your child is still at nursery and could be done together with other parents, as a group. The second interview would take place over the phone, in September 2015 once your child is in primary school.

In addition I will also observe your child learning in their playroom. I will talk to them about what and how they learn in nursery and I will speak to staff and their future teacher about your child's learning. The playroom visit will take place between May and June 2015. I will then visit your child again in their primary school in September or October 2015, where I will once again observe them learning. I will talk to them about what they are learning in school and ask them for their views on what is different between learning in nursery and school. I might ask them to a draw picture for me or to show me their work. I will not photograph your child and I will not use their real name in any materials about the project, everything will be anonymous.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited as a parent of a child in one of the two early years settings included in this study. Eight children from each nursery will all be selected at random.

Are there any risks to you in taking part?
I do not think there are any risks to you or your family, but if you are concerned about any aspects of the project, you can speak to me or my supervisor, Dr Daniela Sime, in advance.

What happens to the information in the project?

I will record what you say, but no one else can listen to what you said or know your name. However, if you tell me that someone like yourself or your child is at risk of harm, I will need to contact the appropriate services. I am required to follow the existing child protection legislation and if a child discloses information that may be considered to place that child at risk then I would follow the statutory guidance associated. I will keep everything in a locked cupboard and on a laptop with a password, so no one apart from me and my supervisor can access the transcripts. All information will be destroyed two years after the end of the project.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

What happens next?
If you are happy to take part, then please could you and your child sign the form called 'Consent Form'. If you do not want to take part, thank you for reading all the materials and for your interest.
After the project is completed, I will write up the findings and include them in my doctoral thesis. I might speak about it at a conference or write articles for publications. I will never use any names of real people or places.

Any questions before you decide?
If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, you can contact me to discuss these in more detail:

Marion Burns
Student researcher, University of Strathclyde
Email: marion.burns@strath.ac.uk
Phone: 0141 435 3565
Mobile: 07881 858153

Dr Daniela Sime
Senior lecturer
School of Social Work & Social Policy
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Lord Hope Building

141 St James Road
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0141   4448678
E-mail: daniela.sime@strath.ac.uk

This project has received ethical approval from the University of Strathclyde's Ethics Committee.
If you wish to contact an independent person about the ethics in this study, please contact:

Eleni Karagiannidou
University   Ethics   Committee
University   of   Strathclyde,   Graham   Hills   Building
50   George   Street
Glasgow, G1 1QE
Telephone: 0141   548   3707
Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk
Thank you for reading this information!

Consent Form

Humanities and Social Sciences

Title of study: Starting school: children's learning at transition to primary school

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential, unless someone is at risk of harm,. No information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project
- I consent to being audio recorded during interviews as part of the project. (circle one) **Yes/ No**

I (PRINT NAME)	I agree to take part in the above project
Signature of Child:	Date
I (PRINT NAME)	I agree for me and my child to take part in the above project
Signature of Parent/Carer for child:	Date

**Appendix 2-Staff invitation to participate
letter and consent form**

Starting School: children's learning at transition to primary school

Thank you for expressing an interest in the above research project. Your contribution is extremely valued and important. My name is Marion Burns and I am studying at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. I would like to tell you a bit about the project I have invited you to take part in, which is part of my doctoral studies.

What is the purpose of this investigation/project?

The purpose of this project is to look at the ways in which educators in early years settings and primary school ensure children's smooth transition. I am also interested in how children and parents experience the curriculum at transition.

Do you have to take part?

I am inviting up to four educators to take part in the project, who have direct involvement with 16 children I will be focussing on. All participation is voluntary. Also, educators may decide to join the project and then change their mind and withdraw, and this is also fine. You can withdraw at any time. No one is obliged to respond or do anything they do not want to.

What will you do in the project?

If you decide to take part, you will be invited to a short interview. The interview will only take 15-20 minutes at a time and place that suits you, possibly in your work place. The interview will be held in Spring 2015 while the study children are still at nursery. I would like to record your responses to make it easier for me to analyse the data I am gathering. When reporting findings, I will not use real names, everything will be anonymous.

In addition I will also observe the child learning in their playroom. I will talk to them about what and how they learn in nursery and I will speak to their parents and future teacher. The playroom visit will take place between May and June 2015. I will then visit the child in their primary school in September or October 2015, where I will once again observe them learning and talk to them about what they are learning in school.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited as an educator in one of the two early years settings or associated primary school included in this study. Eight children from each early years setting will be randomly selected for the study by the researcher.

Are there any risks to you in taking part?

I do not think there are any risks to you in taking part in this project, but if you are concerned about any aspects of the project, you can speak to me or my research supervisor in advance.

What happens to the information in the project?

I will record what you say, but no one else can listen to what you said or know your name. However, if you tell us that someone in your setting is at risk of harm, I will need to contact the appropriate services to protect you and the person at risk, but I will discuss this with you first. I am required to follow the existing child protection legislation and if a child discloses information that may be considered to place that child at risk then I would follow the statutory guidance associated.

All data will be stored securely in a locked cupboard and a password protected laptop and destroyed within two years of completion of the study. No one apart from me and my supervisor can access the transcripts.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

What happens next?
If you are happy to take part, please sign the form called 'Consent Form'.

If you do not want to take part, thank you for reading all the materials and for your interest.

After the project is completed, I will write up the findings and include them in my doctoral thesis. I might speak about the findings at a conference or write articles for publications. I will never use any names of real people or places.

Any questions before you decide?

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, you can contact me or my supervisor Daniela Sime to discuss these in more detail:

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The project has received ethical approval from the University of Strathclyde's Ethics Committee.
If you wish to contact an independent person about the ethics in this study, please contact:

Eleni Karagiannidou
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University   of   Strathclyde,   Graham   Hills   Building
50   George   Street
Glasgow, G1 1QE
Telephone: 0141   548   3707
Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information!

Consent Form

Humanities and Social Sciences

Title of study: Starting school: children's learning at transition to primary school

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered my queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential, unless someone is at risk of harm, and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio recorded during interviews as part of the project. (circle one)
  Yes/ No

I (PRINT NAME)	I agree to take part in the above project
Signature of educator:	Date
I	

Appendix 3-Observation/field notes schedule

Time	Curricular area, type of activity, location in room , interactions with adult/peer, engagement level , +/- affective state **Note in particular episodes of shared thinking – note adult job title + content of episode**	
		coding

Appendix 4-Interview schedule: parent of child at nursery

Starting school: children's learning at transition to primary school

Parental interview /focus group schedule-parent(s) of a (ELC) nursery child

Introduce the project. Explain focus of study on parents' views on transition and on the ways that nursery staff involve parents as partners in their child's learning: by supporting their child's learning and contributing to the content of the 'early level' curriculum.

Child's name (code to be used following interview)…………………………………

Child's experience in nursery

How pleased are you with how your child is getting on in nursery? General points about settling, learning, making friends….

How do you learn about the type of learning experiences that your child has in the nursery? And how well she/he is getting on with these experiences?

In what ways can your child influence the type and range of activities on offer? For example, staff ask you to make suggestions via a newsletter or suggestions board

What else could staff in the nursery do to ensure your child has a say in what they learn?

Working with parents

To what extent are you able to contribute to what your child learns in nursery?

In what ways could you be involved in supporting your child to learn?

What do you think about how the nursery involves you in implementing the curriculum?

Tell me what else you might do to influence what your child learns in nursery?

Moving to School

How does your child generally feel about going to school?

Tell me a bit about what they are looking forward to. What concerns them?

How has the school informed you about the type of activities and topics your child will experience when they move to school? Induction events or curriculum workshops for example

Are you aware of any joint activities involving the staff from nursery and school where they share information about your child and plan for them coming in August? If not how might that help them know your child better?
If yes, what kind of activity take place?

Recommendations

What could the nursery do differently to support your child for school?

What would make it easier for you to support your child with their transition to school?

That is all my questions-but is there anything more you would like to say in relation to transition or the curriculum?

Thank you for your time and support. I hope you will be willing to talk to me again later year to tell me about how XXX is getting on in primary 1.

Appendix 5-Interview schedule: parent of child in P1

Starting school: children's learning at transition to primary school

Parental interview/focus group schedule-parent(s) of a primary 1 child

Remind parents of the project and their previous involvement while their child was in nursery. Explain focus of this interview/focus group is gather parents' views on how the transition experience was for them and their child. The researcher will explore the differences between the two sectors in terms of communications, practice and involvement.

Child's experience in primary 1

How pleased are you with how your child is getting on in school? General points about settling, learning, making friends….

How do you learn about the type of learning experiences that your child has in the classroom? And how well she/he is getting on with these experiences?

Can you tell me a bit about how the school timetable for the day works, for example do you when they have language or mathematics?

Do you think this is different to what they did in nursery? For example, in nursery they might have been allowed to choose what to play with and when.

In what ways do you think the teaching is different? For example, do children sit and listen more compared to their key worker in nursery.

Working with parents

To what extent are you able to contribute to what your child learns in school?

In what ways could you be involved in supporting your child to learn?

What do you think about how the school involves you in implementing the curriculum?

Tell me what else you might do to influence what your child learns in school?

Recommendations

What could the school do differently to support your child now they are in school?

What would have made it easier for you to support your child with their transition to school?

That is all my questions-but is there anything more you would like to say in relation to transition or the curriculum?

Thank you for your time and support.

Appendix 6-Interview schedule: staff in nursery

Starting school: children's learning at transition to primary school

Nursery staff interview schedule

Remind staff of the purpose of the project. The researcher is looking at the ways in which educators in early years settings and primary school ensure children's smooth transition. I am also interested in how children and parents experience the curriculum at transition.

Tell me about your role in the nursery

(Prompts-Do you have responsibility for a key group? What does being a key worker mean and what particular responsibilities do you have for the children?)

How are you involved in planning curriculum activities in the nursery?

Tell me how you observe and assess children's learning in the nursery?

Eight of the children in the nursery who are part of this study are due to go to school in August. What arrangements are in place for their transition to school?

How are you involved in sharing with

(a) school staff information on children's progress in learning?
(b) the child's parent/carer information on their child's progress in learning?

Prompt- Reporting on how well they are achieving the 'early level' outcomes in Curriculum for Excellence.

What other forms of contact do you have with the headteacher and Primary 1 teaching staff in the school?

Prompt- Does this include visits, phone calls and/or meetings with teachers ?

What contact do you have with the children's parents and carers about transition? For example, workshops, parents' evenings

Is there anything else about your job or working in this nursery that you would like to tell us about?

Appendix 7-Interview schedule: staff in primary school

Starting school-children's learning at transition to primary school

Primary staff interview schedule

Remind staff of the purpose of the project. The researcher is looking at the ways in which educators in early years settings and primary school ensure children's smooth transition. I am also interested in how children and parents experience the curriculum at transition.

Tell me about your role in the school?

(Prompts-Do you have responsibility for an aspect of curriculum development?)

How are you involved in planning the early level curriculum for children in your class?

Tell me how you observe and assess children's learning?

Eight of the children in your class are part of this study. They started school in August. How were you involved in the arrangements for their transition from nursery to school?

What information did you receive about the children from: nursery staff and from parents?

How did you use this information to plan the curriculum from the start of term in August?

What if any other information would have been helpful to you when planning the curriculum for the children?

What other forms of contact did you have with the nursery staff and head of centre/manager prior to the children starting school?

In what ways do nursery staff support children in the early days of primary 1? If not at all, can you think of ways you might involve them in the future?

What contact have you had with the children's parents and carers since transition? For example, in workshops, at parents' evenings

Is there anything else about your job or working in this school that you would like to tell us about?

Appendix 8-Example of observation/field note in nursery

Time	Curricular area, type of activity, location in room , interactions with adult/peer, engagement level , +/- affective state **Note in particular episodes of shared thinking – note adult job title + content of episode**	
08.45	The nine children meet with me in staffroom to be reacquainted with me as a helper in the nursery and to check that they are still in agreement that I can be with them and help me with my project. Each child quickly decided this was fine and asked it if they could now go to the playroom. They didn't want to 'record' their agreement.	
0900	Location –free-flow through three large playrooms and outdoor spaces	
	The theme on 'building' was still on going. This is linked to major adaptations about to be made over the summer months to the accommodation in the school and nursery.	
0910 In key worke r group s	John, joins me and shows me his power ranger toy which he had brought with him to nursery. He tells me it is ok to bring a toy as long as it is not too big or easily broken. Children can put their toy in a special tray and get it back at home time.	
	Register is taken by a staff member(student). Children sit in their key worker groups and respond when they hear their name called out.	
0925	John in his group is invited to say which day of the week it is and he is correct. He rightly identifies the label which says, Monday' and then he picks out a weather picture to add to the display.	
	Lewis and Hamish in another group could tell their key worker the date of their birthday. Lewis tells Lorna how many children have a May birthday by reading the pictograph on the wall. Lorna praises him and others for their super concentration. By now Lewis and Hamish have lost interest in the adult's chat and start to talk about playing tennis. They move onto talking about Hamish's friend who is coming over soon for a sleepover while Lewis says he wants to be a 'twister' today.	

9.30 9.45	Hamish looks confused by this statement. They then talk about films they have watched , Despicable Me and Cinderella. The register time over they head off to play. John leaves his group to play with a set of magnifying glasses, the key worker engages him in questioning about what he might use them for but he is not paying attention to her questions. She encourages him to pay closer attention to her questions. Lily and Belle are playing in the house corner when they realise the outdoor space is open-they rush to put on their coats. Kenny and one other child choose a number game (Nadine is using the camera) With support from her they complete the game which invites them to match cards which have pictures and numbers on them. They have to pick out a number of plastic strips and screw them onto the number card. Kenny gets his correct – by bolting blue strips onto a card which has a six on it.
10.05	Lewis chooses a box with shapes inside and sorts them into colours and shapes. Nadine invites him to describe what he is doing and he responds by counting three circles, one each of green, red and yellow. Lily, John, Walter and Belle are all outside.
10.15 10.25	Lily is trying to fill a plant pot with soil using a spoon. She carries the spoon of soil to the planter and repeats this process for five minutes. Walter is close beside her digging and putting soil into a plastic tumbler. Belle is playing chases with a friend and obviously too hot she removes her jacket. The children engage very little with each other at this time. John appears and takes off his jacket too-he clambers in and out of the giant tractor wheels, takes a tumble but is not phased and carries on with his game. Lily and one other child excitedly declare the have found a bug. Lily is heard to say 'it might be an insect, I have one in my house'. Child tells her 'how he found one like it and put it down the toilet pan' Lily, 'look it is moving', 'does it still look alive?' Lorna suggests they find the magnifying glass to take a closer look. Walter is playing roughly and he knocks Kelsey over and she gets covered in mud, Belle and Kathleen console her. Kelsey

	cries a bit then is removed inside to get changed. Lorna asks Walter to apologise for being rough which he does willingly before heading off to swing again on the hanging tyres.	
10.35 i	Lily returns with the magnifying glass, strips off her coat and starts to dig again discarding the magnifying glass. Belle sits on a two wheeler watching the digging. She appears content to be mostly on the side-lines, as does Kathleen.	
10.40	Kelsey comes back outside in clean clothes. She is looking for attention from the adults outside. She shows them her clean outfit and tells them what happened to her, pointing to Walter who is unaware he is being talked about. Lorna and Joan show interest in her account then suggest she joins others who are with Jacky.	
	Jill is supporting a numeracy activity. Chalk lines are drawn freely and compared to the with the length of the dinosaur found in the soil. Kathleen enjoys this activity and is keen to work with Jill who supports her to talk about what she knows about real dinosaurs. Walter and Lily are now collaborating in their earth moving activities. They continue to fill the planters with a spoonful at a time of soil.	
10.55	Walter loses interest and resumes his energetic play. He runs in circles at great speed. He is really focussed on his running expending great energy as he circuits the outdoor space. He stops and begins to move the giant Lego bricks about, it is not clear why he has abruptly stopped his running.	
11.00	Belle is desperate to get a turn on the two wheeler again but this is being used by Kathleen. Kathleen notes this and is reluctant to share. Belle puts her coat back on and stands back watching others. She has not been engaged this session choosing to spend a lot of time observing. Her face shows no particular emotion.	
	Walter and three others ride the three wheelers ably cycling in and out of the other children. Walter take a passenger on the back of his bike.	
	Kelsey, Lewis and Hamish have snack. Kelsey eats her snack quickly and goes to the book area. The boys linger chatting and having 'extras'. They seem to be content in each other's company and chatter away. Content of their chat wasn't heard from my position in the playroom.	

	Nadine moves to support Kelsey who is sitting alone in the book area. She engages her in conversation about her day.
	John is beside the water trough with two others. He is splashing a lot and is reminded of the rules and about keeping him and others safe. He acknowledges the reminder and continues to splash and pour and fill the containers. He is a member of the group that is going to the gym with the active sports coordinator and so he has to leave his play. Almost immediately the playroom is quieter as two groups go away at a time with key workers. The remaining children have a lot of space to play.
11.45	Kelsey is still with Nadine. Kelsey perseveres with support to complete the giant A to Z jigsaw. The jigsaw complete she sings the alphabet song and is praised by Nadine. Kelsey asks Nadine to help her tie the 'bells' onto her dolly. She wants her dolly to swing. Kelsey says, 'how can we get her to swing?' Nadine suggests they each take a hand and she demonstrates how this can be done. After several 'swings' she decides to balance on the blocks which have been set out as a 'road' by a group of girls nearby. Kelsey counts as she walks but loses her balance a bit on the higher pile of blocks. Nadine suggests to the group that for safety they should reduce the height of the 'road'. They take it in turns to walk the blocks, 'I'm walking to Glasgow' shouts Kelsey.
	Belle comes in from the garden and says she needs a drink. Walter and Kenny appear briefly from the garden. Walter is waving a plastic ruler he has found.
	The gym groups return and John helps to tidy the giant blocks. The next two groups go off to the gym. Lewis, Walter, Kenny, Belle, Lily, Hamish and Kelsey line up one behind the other at the playroom door. They know the routine and comply with the instructions from key workers. A register is taken before they leave to walk the corridor through the school to the gym hall which is some distance away. When asked why they were going to the gym and what they might do there, Lewis offers, 'to get fit and healthy'.
	Before they take part in the gym session the sports coach William asks them, 'do we run in the same direction round the gym?' 'do we hold hands when we are running?' 'do we stand on the lines?' The children all chorus, 'no'. Throughout the session almost all of the children engage energetically with the activities.

One child has difficulty following the instructions and is reminded to 'pay attention'. The games are focused on colour recognition and this same child fails to stand beside the correct cone. He is supported by staff. The project group children all show they know their colours. Kathleen is particularly sharp at stopping and finding a partner then standing beside the designated cone. They work in pairs for a bit to stand by a cone when the whistle blows then on their own to find a coloured cone. The coach then starts to remove the number of cones so that children are 'out' if they don't find a cone to stand beside. Kathleen is tripped up and bumps her head, a cold compress is applied and she sits out. Lewis is out of the cone game and he accepts this gracefully. Belle is out next then Lily followed by Walter and Kelsey. Kenny is next and Hamish wins the game.

Children return to the playroom. In their groups they clean their teeth and then listen to a story before parents etc arrive to collect them at noon.

Appendix 9-Example of observation/field notes in P1

Time		
9.10	Location –Primary 1 classroom and open area within the early stages area of the school. Children from 0900 have an active start session which allows them free flow in and out of the room to access other activities in the open area. Eddie and I met just before the bell to gain his consent to work with me again. He needed support to recall his previous involvement prior to the summer. I reminded him that he had been in another setting and that his nursery friends were at a different school. Eddie is over by the 'bakery' and is watching rather than engaged with his peers. Others are in the construction, painting, pattern making with pegs, pinning shapes using small hammers and metal pins, using number games alone or with friends, or cutting and sticking. Eddie is not attempting any of these activities. He tries again approach the children acting out roles as the baker and customers. They don't engage with him. He uses his 'phone' to make a call. His conversation to the caller cannot be heard.	
9.25		
9.30	Eddie notices me and comes over and engages with me. (the CT had previously introduced me as a visitor) we talked again about seeing him in his nursery before the summer. He did remember but he couldn't recall the names of any of his nursery friends. Children are invited to tidy up, a loud, 'aw' is heard from the children who had clearly been enjoying their play. They meet as a class on the carpet area and have a lively wake up and shake up session with the class teacher. Eddie is reluctant to join in the actions and sing along with the taped music. A few girls nearby are giving it their all, shaking and singing enthusiastically. The session over there is some activity around finding a space on the carpet. Prayers are said and everyone is welcomed, days of the week song is sung and there is some interaction with children whose names are selected from tub of lollipop sticks. The focus of the questioning is about the weather today. Eddie is chewing the sleeve of his school sweatshirt.	

	The class are generally very attentive.	
	The class teacher outlines the next set of activities- first children have two jobs to do.	
	One involves getting a whiteboard and a black marker pen, the other involves coming back and sitting on the floor beside their shoulder partner.	
	Class teacher praises children for being successful at following instructions and being ready to listen.	
9.55	WALT- we are learning to write a sentence. Eddie has his hand up with a response to the question, 'what do we need to remember about making a sentence?' the teacher asks another child for the answer.	
	Class teacher puts up on the smart board a picture of a farm scene. She uses the lollipop sticks again and Ethan is chosen.	
	CT What can you see in the picture?	
	Eddie, 'I can see a cow, a house and people, a man with a bag' it is a magic bag.'	
10.05	There are several more questions and children respond eagerly.	
	CT the children are asked to think of a sentence and share this with their shoulder partner, volunteers are invited to say aloud their sentence. A sentence is then picked and the CT writes this on whiteboard for all to see. She makes a few deliberate errors and children notice and call out to have them corrected.	
10.20	'I can see a butterfly' is written with correct finger spaces and correct punctuation.	
	CT invites children to alter the sentence to include a different last word. Child offers, 'I can see a house'	
	CT sends children back to seats to now write their own sentence on the whiteboard they collected earlier. CT uses helpers to give out materials for the activities and praise frequently the efforts of all children.	
10.30	Eddie decides on his sentence and needs support with the spelling of, 'doggy'. His letter formation is still developing and	

he finds it difficult to write all the words on the whiteboard-his letters vary in size. Once this task is complete the children are expected to copy sentence into their jotters.

Of the children at the group Eddie is the least able in terms of his skill and confidence in having a go at writing. He is off task and finds interest in what is going on around him. He chews his sleeve for much of the time spent on the carpet.

Eddie wants to show me his writing jotter. M helps him to get started- she is clearly the organiser at the group, giving instruction to others about the particular task.

CT writes Eddie's sentence for him using a yellow highlighter and he overwrites then copies the sentence again below. His peers are focused on the task and when done they place completed jotter work in a tray.

Eddie tells me he is tired and puts on a 'tired sleepy face', he livens up when it is tidy up time for it will soon be break time. He responds well to the CT's praise as a great helper.

Class come together to go over what they have learned and to share their learning. J reads out her story. CT uses this opportunity to remind children of the key aspects of the lesson- how to write a sentence correctly. JJ is the 'sticker guy' and he is charged with giving, 'high fives' and a sticker to children.

CT uses AiFl gimmicks to praise the children's achievements this morning. They conclude with a song which creates a lot of excitement and laughter, 'the button song' which is all about Joe who works in the button factory. Eddie joins in the actions which involves children in eventually simultaneously patting their heads while turning the machine knobs, and tapping their feet and singing. Almost all could manage the complicated actions.

Children collect snacks and put on coats to go out for playtime. Eddie's mum is waiting outside as she is a volunteer mum who is going with the children after break on a welly walk.

Appendix 10-Example of transcript of interview with a parent

<u>0029 Mistletoe PS (previously Mistletoe Nursery)</u>

How pleased are you with how your child is getting on in school? General points about settling, learning, making friends….

She is very happy and seems settled with the classes that she in and with the teachers.

How do you learn about the type of learning experiences that your child has in the classroom? And how well she/he is getting on with these experiences?

We had a workshop a couple of weeks into term where the teachers ran through with us their methods of teaching the children different subjects like maths and literacy, that was really helpful. I think it is very early days I don't think they have learned a lot as of yet. They are taking it quite slow and focusing on sounds and rhymes. Any homework she has been asked to do she has had no problem with it.

Can you tell me a bit about how the school timetable for the day works, for example do you when they have language or mathematics? Do you think this is different to what they did in nursery? For example, in nursery they might have been allowed to choose what to play with and when.

It is more structured and so basically they divide up the day and each day is different and they have their PE section in there a couple of days. They cover two to three subjects each day. It is quite different because there isn't that choice and time and therefore they have to do their things like numeracy. Rather than doing learning at the desks they can move about the classroom and they can choose the way they want to learn about something. They were explaining that every child has a different approach to learning, so some may find a visual task better than actually being spoken to by a teacher and in that way it seems similar to the nursery. She seems fine but I am not sure how much she is guided by the teacher but she isn't coming home with any sort of confusion and its only four to five weeks into P1 but she seems fine.

In what ways could you be involved in supporting your child to learn?

They stressed to us about the reading side of things and if they have a good focus on reading then that is sort of the basics of more or less any subject in school. So just talking to them and explaining things and not using basic examples using more interesting examples. For example not the basic one plus one equals two. Any type of feedback is good and sometimes it's difficult to know because the feedback sometimes isn't very clear as to how they are doing and it would be good to know if there is an area that they might need to focus on more. Communication could be better for example by email. A teacher has 25-30 pupils so understandably this could be difficult."

What would have made it easier for you to support your child with their transition to school?

A guideline on how to help them focus when moving from pre-school to school.

0008 Mistletoe Nursery

Tell me about your role in the nursery?

As team leader I support the children and the key workers, doing strategic support in terms of planning and resourcing. Fundamentally to ensure the children receive the best education and care that we can provide.

To provide a secure environment for the curricular activities, ensure that they feel comfortable coming in to. Using age and stage and using appropriate activities for the children that are coming through to ages 3-5. Providing support for parents and building relationships.

Give the children a love of learning. Ensuring that they enjoy the style of learning and they are happy with me and be able to learn. Working through the curriculum and getting to know it as I am not as familiar with this as I am from another country. I have been working through numeracy, literacy and health and well-being.

How are you involved in planning curriculum activities in the nursery?

We do collegiate planning and we do that weekly and we get together and do it with the children as a team as well. We plan with the children based on their interests and then after we come together and evaluate it, review it and how we are going to take it forward. We do area planning, individual planning; we meet and discuss the children every fortnight at lunchtime. We use the area plans that they have filled in with the children and evaluated with the children. We just generally discuss and we have a sheet that we keep with the children's name on it and we go through it and keep track of them and see how they are progressing. Also if there is anything as a team that we have noted or individually."

We do observations on the floor daily and we a weekly review of that. We would use a system of writing it down and keeping note but also taking notes mentally. We have observation sheets and on the back of the planning sheet there is different sections where there is opportunities for that. We take these around with us they are moveable not workable documents so that is the idea. We do a four step planning system where we look at the long term in August and for the year we have the strategic elements that come from the Scotland themes, Scots language theme for a couple of years, health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy running through to transitions and eco schools etc. We base it into the local area, through the seasons and the river through the seasons rather that looking at them individually. It then breaks down into our medium term plan which we do for three terms and we look at the experiences and outcomes each three months that fit in with the time of the year and what we are looking at. Three or four for each of the different curricular activities and we do that a few times per year so that we cover the different experience and outcomes and that filters into our area plans and

individual plans. We do a few different group activities, these come from the children's interests and we plan and consult with them and that comes to be a floorbook and that is based on cycles of civilisation. We do groups for children that have a particular interest or a more able group and these seem to work quite well.

We started a project on Australia and the children were quite interested in the animal part. We went to visit the zoo and they enjoyed that. It has been good to watch them enjoy the project as we have gone through it. We have changed the cycle of civilisation to meet Curriculum for Excellence for each individual child. Rather than being a floor book it is broken down into children's individual cycles. So they are all together as a group but you follow their progress individually.

How are you involved in sharing:
    (a) school staff information on children's progress in learning?
(b) the child's parent/carer information on their child's progress in learning?

We have a transition calendar that we look at, at the start of the year and our early stages teacher is involved with that. We liaise with ourselves, the school and the early stages teacher (That is looking at the primary transition). However if you are looking at the new children coming to nursery this is different.

They come in for their enrolment and we can see them in that environment, we do a consultation with their all about me books, we get to know the parents, we get to know the child, care plans are prepared and we look at targets and how we are going to bring them forward. So that we get a good feel about the child all round. And what stage they are at. We work alongside the parents and make good relationships with the parents. This all starts before they actually start nursery so that when they come in they have met all the staff and know the environment. We have then already started a bond with the parents.

We use the newsletters and we have the parents involved as 'Play partners'. We have a little bit on the wall outside the nursery that identifies what a 'Play partner' is as far as Mistletoe Nursery is concerned. From getting involved what it may enable the parents to see about their child's learning in a more formal situation and we do this all throughout the year. We have a meeting at the start of the year where the PT and the headteacher meet informally with the parents and discuss the year ahead with the pre-schoolers. This is so they are aware of the transition calendar and some of the things that have previously happened that will happen this year, that may be different but it's preparing their child to take the next step but it starts away back in September.

Throughout the year we work closely with the school and they come and visit us and are involved in all the things that we do. The buddies, spring concerts, Christmas concerts, they invite us to nativity plays. We do loads together throughout the year, we went along with school to do planting, we were involved in the P1 active play. They were making up stations and

activities and our children went to join them. We shared a lot of the floorbooks together with the P1s.

The joint planning was because our cycles were so established and how we used them we shared them with P1-P3 teachers using a presentation and we worked closely with one of the P1 teachers. We had to start somewhere so we chose one of the more able children and we worked closely with a university. We took this group along and for a whole term towards the summer we were involved in a project on the senses. This group of ten children went into the P1 class twice a week with myself and the P1 teacher working together to plan using the cycles of symbolisation.

We have been down to observe numeracy activities, so staff observing numeracy P1 lessons and the P1 staff came up to the nursery. Myself, the PT teacher the P1 staff got together and talked about the trackers for numeracy and literacy and that itself could become more supportive of P1 teachers so that the children hit the ground running when they go with numeracy and literacy.

Having the calendar to know when the dates are the visits is handy and we can inform the parents. The children have sometimes if there has been space have been offered to have lunch in the school so that then they are even familiar with their lunches. Children that are on additional support plans get help with more different visits to places which helps with being the same building, so visits to the toilets and to the playground which helps with the emotional side and wellbeing.

Doing this gets them familiar with the grounds and the infant end and the grounds as a whole and also the upper school area. We also take walks around the school and look at what they are doing and how that relates to what we are doing. Any friendships that could be supportive of learning could be brought together when the formation of classes comes up or vice versa if they were not going to be supportive of learning. The staff get to go out to other schools when the new starts are only in for a half day in the afternoon.

What contact do you have with the children's parents and carers about transition? For example, workshops, parents' evenings

The parents get to see the P1 environment and the staff. From the minute they come in the door we are preparing them. Children represent their family culture and you are talking to parents on a day to day basis.

There are days where the parents come along and we are giving them information as well as the school and the relationships are good. The parents can see their reports at this time of the year and we do work closely with the school and they do come down for all sorts of things. There is a sheltered housing project and we visit a local care home and the parents come along with us. The kids go along with the P1/P2s and the parents are involved as much as they want to be. We use newsletters and things to give the parents all the information they need for uniform and for things going on, on the learning side as well. Then at the formal parents nights they are aware of the curriculum and what it is all about.

We do an open evening where a teacher is there if any parents want to ask any questions and in their pre-school year often we get parents wanting to know if there is things they should know or need to do. We have an informal night coming up for the parents where we will start with a range of activities that the children experience on a day-to-day basis and then they will go from there to P1 to see the progression.

We are lucky to have the school next to us but we do take the children outwith school to other schools.

We put a questionnaire out at parents night so they get a chance to comment on the whole experience and gather views of the parents.

Transition is getting better in general but most of our children going to the school that is on site they have great relationships and working as close as we can with the teachers in the school and looking at that early level and the curriculum and what it means.

Developing the open area and free play within the school is something that is being looked and they have a lot working on the active play and using that environment and also with role play and drama. Also the outdoor work that they were doing with the stations has been good and it has got a lot better but it would be good to get us together in the one area.

Appendix 12-Example of transcript of interview with staff in school

<u>0031 Mistletoe PS</u>

Tell me about your role in the school?

I am a class teacher. This year I am in P1 and this is my first time teaching early level and I am very excited. I have previously had two years with P* and last year I had P*. Apart from being a class teacher I am the ** co-ordinator for the school

How are you involved in planning the early level curriculum for children in your class?

It is very collegiate. Myself and my stage partner and Miss T work closely together, almost on a daily basis, to discuss where we are going to go, to discuss formative assessment for the children. We are doing a phonic assessment to have a record of how they are with their single sounds and then move towards blending. We plan on a weekly basis for our numeracy, mathematics and literacy activities and general professional dialogue at the end of each day to discuss any adaptations that need to be made. We plan IDL topics together and we do our best to link them into our outcomes for literacy and numeracy. I am developing the *** programme and *** outcomes and ways that will be taught.

How are you involved in planning the early level curriculum for children in your class?

I got their transition notes, they were from various nurseries. I had their reports to parents sent but I didn't get it from all of them. I got their baseline assessments for literacy and numeracy that we have continued on with now and any staged intervention plan that I have discussed now with our DHT and they have now been updated. I was able to go into the nursery for one day and due to having P* last year I didn't get a big chance to be involved in the transition of the early years. I did get one day where I was able to go to the nursery and meet the children that would be in my class and have a discussion with the key worker and the principal teacher. She spoke with me about the children and about the social and economic factors, abilities within learning and how they are socially with other children. There was a slight disconnect with professional judgement, some staff in the nursery said secure in 1 to 5 but it's not what we would consider secure. I think in the future it would be helpful to have more collegiate working together in order to share a standard. So that if they say something then we know that it is because that was slightly difficult when looking at transition notes and making an idea in your head where that child was. For example if they said a child was a 5 but I actually thought they were a 10, a more sharing of standard and

shared dialogue on what certain things and what they would show up as in the child's ability.

What contact have you had with the children's parents and carers since transition? For example, in workshops, at parents' evenings

Not much contact before they arrived. I met them very briefly when they came in to meet the then P6 buddies, so they would see what buddy their child would have when they came to school. I would have had more involvement in the transition if I had time but it was just because of the circumstances. We already have a parent opening evening in the P1 classes. There were various stations on literacy to show parents how we teach reading, writing, handwriting and blending and how homework will work. I did a similar one with numeracy and how we will be teaching numeracy and numbers and also shapes and small parts of measurement. We then swapped over and I was able to meet my children's parents as well as the other P1 classes parents.

In what ways do nursery staff support children in the early days of primary 1? If not at all, can you think of ways you might involve them in the future?

They came on the very first morning and a few of them came down to say 'hello' to everyone and then they stayed in the class for five to ten minutes. One of the staff stayed longer as quite a few of her children were in my class and just to ease the transition with taking their jackets off and getting them settled and sat down. A group of pre-school children have been coming down to play with us and they have joined in the play with the children. The nursery staff also join in and we have a transitional play session. The more involvement the better and some children may benefit from the continuity as for example some children suffer from anxiety. I think a more gradual transition would be more beneficial for these children. This could be for just targeted children as not all of them need it. I think the play that we are doing just now is really good as it allows the children to interact with the nursery children and it is giving them a sense of ownership. They are getting to explain to the younger children how to play new games and what they do in school.

Appendix 13-Example of process codes

Process codes-emerging from semi-structured interview transcripts with educators ELC and PS-

Categories (in brackets)- emerging from semi-structured interview transcripts with educators ELC and PS-

(C/P)- curriculum/planning

(E)- environment

(ROA)- role of the adult

(RR)- rules and routines

(PrE)- Priming events

(CPE)- Communication parental engagement

(W/R)- Wellbeing/relationships

(PL)- playing and learning

(LP)Leadership/professionalism

1	leading learning	(ROA)
2	planning learning	(C/P)
3	training –CPD/professional learning	(LP)
4	teaching approaches/pedagogy	(ROA)
5	planning curriculum activities/areas of the curriculum	(C/P)
6	observing learning	(ROA)
7	supporting learning	(ROA)
8	tracking learning	(ROA)
9	recording/reporting progress	(CPE)
10	assessing children's learning	(ROA)
11	covering the curriculum	(C/P)
12	adult initiated curriculum activity	(RR)
13	child initiated curriculum activity	(PL)
14	meeting children's needs	(W/R)
15	using the environment/ resources	(E)
16	developing skills	(PL)
17	priming activities/events-bridging topics	(PrE)
18	working with parents-involving/communicating	(CPE)
19	preparing children for school	(PrE)
20	collaborating with educators in school/nursery	(ROA)

21	sharing GIRFEC information	(W/R)
22	ability grouping of children	(RR)
23	following routines/imposing structures, rules and ways of working	(RR)
24	forming/sustaining relationships	(W/R)
25	planning involving children's interests	(C/P)
26	recognising achievement	(ROA)
27	sharing the standard	(C/P)
28	respecting professional judgement	(LP)
29	questioning the integrity of professional judgement	(LP)
30	planning for curriculum continuity	(C/P)
31	implementing curriculum continuity	(C/P)

Appendix 14-Example of assigning process code-12-exercising agency

Process Code-==12 exercising agency==

John, Kenny and Nadine (EYP) were soon working together building, using Lego. The two children were engrossed in their activity

==The children created a bin lorry==

John is now ==making a weapon from Lego== and claims he is Darth Vader, the   baddy.

Lily is ==sitting at a table with small world toys,== she collaborates with a friend ==then after a short time wanders off outside.==

Lewis is hand washing before his snack, he and Kenny are obviously form   friends, ==they follow each other from place to place stopping to engage with a known adult helper.==   ==They serve themselves snack and sit and chat,== staff   member inviting them to share their chat with her. ==They don't hang about and   are soon off outside.==

Appendix 15-Memo on coding activity

Analytical memos-1 from process coding of playroom and classroom observation transcripts

Saldana (2009), asserts that memo writing is data analysis. Further he suggests memos are a way of reflecting on the coding choices that emerge from the data corpus. They are useful in capturing initial thoughts about potential themes, patterns and concepts and can help formulate theory. Memo writing should happen concurrently with coding and should be suggestive rather than conclusive, (Saldana, 2009: 33). They offer a way of dumping all that is in your brain, and the memos that follow surely fit that assertion.

4.8.17

Personal reflection-coding playroom and classroom observation transcripts

I have been actively reading and re-reading the data corpus then coding the transcripts since the data was gathered in 2015 albeit on an informal basis, reflecting on what the text was saying to me. In April 2017, I trawled through all the observation transcripts and assigned an initial code. I repeated this process again in June 2017 refining the codes and I noted a number of gaps. Text that I hadn't previously coded leapt out at me as requiring attention.

I've now completed the process coding for all the playroom and classroom transcripts. The coding activity was done manually using a pink highlighter and a numbering system, it was time consuming but a worthwhile and revealing exercise.

Using the advice from Saldana's book on coding I have gone through line by line the playroom and classroom observation transcripts. I used 'process coding' as it offered the most relevant method for capturing 'human activity'. 'The on-going action/interaction/emotion taken in response to situations, or problems' (Corbin and Strauss, 1998: 169) I generated thirty process codes using gerunds.

At last the data was talking to me and linking to my research questions. This for me was an important moment, I could see in the data, differences between the curriculum on offer in ELC and that on offer in a primary classroom. Not only that but the clear lack of agency some of the study children had in a more structured primary classroom learning environment. A possible theme might be 'agency'.

Reflecting on the research question(s)

(1) In what ways do staff ensure curriculum continuity across the CfE, 'early level'?

This study aims to address the barriers that get in the way of staff implementing a continuous early level curriculum experience. Coding suggests that the early level curriculum in a nursery is more responsive, fluid and shaped by the interests of the children as expressed by them at the time. In contrast the excerpt below taken from a classroom observation transcript highlights the differences in children's curriculum experience. The children are more directed to and expected to comply with norms and routines regarding what they will learn and when. I now need to compare the emerging story from the observation data with the story emerging from the transcripts of interviews with educators and parents. The need for triangulation to build reliability.

Code definition-12 exercising agency

By this I interpret that children in the excerpt below are making choices about what they want to do, they select the spaces to play and learn, they decide what resources they want to use. They make decisions about what they will do with the resource. They stop using the space and or resource when they have lost interest in it or are directed by another external influence that may include direction from an adult, a peer or they themselves make a choice to play elsewhere, drawn to another activity or need.

Code definition: 15-directing learning and 8- complying

In creating these two codes I see directing learning being linked but not the same as teaching or pedagogy. Here the adult is literally directing the children to complete a set activity. To do so at a time chosen by the adult and to complete it in a particular way with no room for the child to choose how to approach the activity or change the activity to something else. Complying is taken to mean that children are expected to obey the instruction. The culture of the classroom is clearly different to the playroom as evidenced by the two vignettes below. There are rules in nursery around keeping safe for example or being kind and respectful. Though nursery children, it would appear from the data have greater autonomy.

Emerging *codes, patterns, categories, themes from data*

At this early stage in my analysis I can see some patterns and themes emerging. I can see the following patterns: the role of the adult, a reflexive curriculum, an overly directed curriculum, variations in styles of teaching, social interaction, dispositions, the agentic child, supporting learners, the importance/influence of the physical and cultural environment. The two excerpts chosen to illustrate this focus on three process codes: exercising agency, complying and directing learning.

Excerpt 1

Date of observation 20.5.15 Mistletoe Nursery

Code definition- 12 exercising agency

J, K and N (NT) were soon working together building, using Lego. The two children were engrossed in their activity

The children created a bin lorry.

J is now making a weapon from Lego and claims he is Darth Vader, the baddy.

Lily is sitting at a table with small world toys, she collaborates with a friend then after a short time wanders off outside.
Lewis is hand washing before his snack, he and Kenny are obviously firm friends, they follow each other from place to place stopping to engage with a known adult helper. They serve themselves snack and sit and chat, a staff member invites them to share their chat with her. They don't hang about and are soon off outside.

H is choosing a book, he settles to read then after a bit asks N to read to him. Lu has reappeared and goes into the wigwam. He uses the large multi blocks to make a crane.

Excerpt 2

Date of observation 21.9.15 Bluebell PS

Code definition: 15-directing learning and 8- complying

CT recaps on the story-Little red riding hood. The children are invited to tell the CT which for them was the best bit of the story and to say why. The CT uses lollipop sticks to choose who will offer an answer.

CT now explains what the activities are for this next part of the morning. Children are reminded that they are responsible for collecting their own resources and for working respectfully with those sitting at their group. The CT asks the children if they can remember any of the golden rules for working on activities.

Hildur offers, 'we use quiet voices' this response is praised and another child offers, 'we mustn't forget to put our name on our work'. CT sends children off one group at a time to collect resources and to get started on their tasks.

Networks and connections between codes, patterns, categories, themes.

Even in reflecting on these two short excerpts I can see overlap with other codes that I have assigned to data. For example, code 8- complying could also be compared and contrasted with 13-following rules. For now I will retain both. Similarly, that some of the narrative could sit in more than one code name. For example in this extract from Bluebell PS

CT praises (*could be both 26-praising achievement and 27-supporting learners*) the children for good listening (*could be both 14-applying skills and 5-communicating*) as she walks about looking and supporting children to complete the various literacy tasks (*could be both 9-pedagogy and 27-supporting learners*) Not all of the children have the same sequencing activity. It is obvious that the CT has grouped the children and their task according to ability.   A classroom assistant (CA) has arrived and is working at a table giving support to the group of four children.

Theory-emergent or related existent

5.8.17
Reflecting on whether I can connect the set of thirty process codes and emerging patterns to theory is useful at this point. I see that the child in nursery is situated in an ecological system that is supportive and responsive to their interests (SEE EXCERPT 1 ABOVE) . The microsystem is working in harmony with the child. The children in primary school are adjusting to a new microsystem, learning the culture of the environment. (SEE EXCEPT 2 ABOVE) One particular study child is not conforming to the structures imposed on him, another is as Bourdieu puts it, 'a fish out of the water'. He is chewing his school jumper and not yet finding his place in this new world. Socio-cultural theory could be relevant here in theorising what is going on for 'Eddie'. Similarly, the fact that the curriculum is repeating activities that I know Eddie experienced in his nursery setting some weeks before. Bruner's spiral curriculum also relevant. Where is the opportunity for the child to build on prior knowledge to have problem solving activities that with the right inputs from adults would challenge and motivate him more appropriately?

Prayers are said and everyone is welcomed, days of the week song is sung and there is some interaction with children whose names are selected from tub of lollipop sticks. The focus of the questioning is about the weather today.

E is chewing the sleeve of his school sweatshirt.

6.8.17

Problems/ethical considerations

I am aware that Eddie demonstrated some developmental issues, he is already a year older than the other study children. I need to be mindful of ethical sensitivities when presenting my findings.

Next steps/Future directions for study

I am now really keen to up the pace in writing, to complete the data analysis and to share with supervisors at my next meeting my thoughts on emerging patterns etc. I need to arrange for XXX to inter-rate the data. I have also been working on the theoretical map/framework again.

Final report

Some really colourful narrative in the data that I will use in the discussion of findings chapter.

Appendix 16-Code guide

Table 1

Process codes-emerging from playroom and classroom observation transcripts

Categories (in brackets)-emerging from playroom and classroom observation transcripts

(PL)- playing and learning

(E)- environment

(ROA)- role of the adult

(A)- agency

(RR)- rules and routines

(C)- curriculum

Themes

CA-Children's agency
PIP-Professional identity and practice
CII-Curriculum-intended and implemented

Code number	Process Code name	Process Code definition	Category	Theme	Links to RQs
1	accessing the learning spaces	Children moving about the playroom deciding where to play	(PL)	CA/CII	1
2	familiarising	Educators providing children with reason for my visits	(E)	PIP	
3	finding out about the study	Educators and children receiving information from researcher	(ROA)	PIP	

4	agreeing assent	Researcher engagement with children to achieve assent	(A)	CA	
5	communicating-verbal and non-verbal	Children talking, listening, looking, using body language or gesture to communicate with others	(C)	CA	
6	playing and learning	Children in their setting learning through play	(PL)	CA/CII	1
7	contributing to curriculum and learning (children)	Children contributing their views on what they would like to learn.	(C)	CA/CII	3
8	complying with instruction/rules	Children obeying a direct instruction or rule that an educator has imposed	(RR)	CA	1
9	teaching/pedagogy	Strategies used by educators to impart knowledge, to include a range of approaches including direct teaching to individuals, small groups, whole class	(ROA)	PIP	1
10	lacking in focus	Children not attending or focussed on the task they have been	(PL)	CA/CII	1

		assigned by an educator			
11	expressing a view (children)	Verbal or non-verbal utterance by child that offers a point of view or opinion to include body language	(A)	CA	2
12	exercising agency	Children using their own thoughts and intent to take part or not in activities at a time and place of their choosing	(A)	CA	2
13	following routines	Children are aware and comply with the structures of the day that are in place such as time for tooth brushing, time for group time	(RR)	CA	1
14	applying skills	Children use skills they already possess to help them complete a task or activity that they may have chosen or was directed by an educator	(PL)	CA/CII	1
15	directing learning (adults)	Educators instructing children or groups or individuals to	(ROA)	PIP/CII	1

		complete a task or an activity			
16	responding positively	Children respond by verbal or non-verbal means to engage with an activity or a situation, they persevere and complete the activity/task	(A)	CA/CII	3
17	responding negatively	Children respond by verbal or non-verbal means to demonstrate their unwillingness or unhappiness with engaging in a task or a situation, they give up or refuse to complete the activity/task	(A)	CA/CII	3
18	seeking knowledge/clarificatio n (children)	Children ask for help from an educator or peer for support to complete a task or an activity, the request could include non-verbal behaviours	(A)	CA	3
19	gaining/acquiring new skills/problem solving	Children through teaching or by their own efforts through play/employing	(C)	PIP	1

		problem solving strategies acquire new skills			
20	engaging in curriculum activity	Children take part in curriculum activities that are planned for by educators	(C)	CII	1
21	responding to instruction/questioning (children)	Children carry out an specific instruction, offer an answer to a question posed by an educator, complete an action	(RR)	CA/PIP	1
22	playing with peers	Children choose who they play with and where and for a length of time determined by the child concerned	(PL)	CA	3
23	playing alone	Children choose to play alone in a location selected by them and for a duration set by them	(PL)	CA	3
24	failing to achieve/succeed in task/activity	Children are unsuccessful in their completion of a task, unable to perform a task set by an educator due	(PL)	CA/CII	1

		to lack of understanding or lack of skill set needed to be successful			
25	achieving	Children's successful completion of a task set by an educator	(PL)	CA/CII	1
26	praising achievements (adults)	Educators acknowledge children's success using a range of approaches to include gesture and physical rewards such as stickers	(ROA)	PIP	1
27	supporting learning/learners	Educators recognise a child's need for support and take action to bring about a positive outcome for the learner.	(ROA)	PIP	1
28	attention seeking	Children use gesture, verbal and non-verbal actions to attract the attention of another to include educators	(A)	CA	3
29	questioning by adults	Children are asked questions	(ROA)	PIP	1
30	explaining/offering information	Educators use a range of communication means to aid	(ROA)	PIP/CII	1

		children's understanding to include the use of IT systems, and other artefacts			

Table 2

Process codes-emerging from transcripts of discussion with study children from Mistletoe PS and their drawings

Categories (in brackets)-emerging from transcripts of discussion with study children from Mistletoe PS and their drawings

(K) Knowledge [playing and learning]

(E)- Environment

(A) Adjustment [rules and routines]

(D) Dispositions [wellbeing]

(S) Skills [playing and learning]

Themes

CA-Children's agency
PIP-Professional identity and practice
CII-Curriculum-intended and implemented

Code number	Process code name	Process code definition	Category	Theme	Links to RQs
1	knowing self as a learner-possessing a skill or not	Children articulate the skills they possess or know they have still to acquire		CA	1,3
2	acquiring skills	The action involved to be able to master a skill. Children through teaching or by their own efforts through play/employing		PIP	1

		problem solving strategies acquire new skills			
3	communicating- verbal and non-verbal	Children talking, listening, looking, using body language or gesture to communicate with others		CA	3
4	expressing a view (children)	Verbal or non-verbal utterance by child that offers a point of view or opinion to include body language		CA	2
5	playing and learning	Children in their setting learning through play		CA/CII	1
6	lacking in focus	Children not attending or focussed on the task they have been assigned by an educator		CA/CII	1
7	contributing to curriculum and learning (children)	Children contributing their views on what they would like to learn.		CA	3
8	complying with instruction/rules	Children obeying a direct instruction or rule that an educator has imposed		CA/PIP	1
9	following routines	Children are aware and comply with the structures of the day that are in place such as time for tooth brushing, time for group time		CA	1
10	exercising agency	Children using their own thoughts and intent to take part or not in activities at a time and place of their choosing		CA	3

| 11 | applying skills | Children use skills they already possess to help them complete a task or activity that they may have chosen or was directed by an educator | | CA/CII | 1 |

Table 3

Process codes-emerging from semi-structured interview transcripts with practitioners and teachers

Categories (in brackets)- emerging from semi-structured interview transcripts with practitioners and teachers
-

(C/P)- curriculum/planning

(E)- environment

(ROA)- role of the adult

(RR)- rules and routines

(PrE)- Priming events

(CPE)- Communication parental engagement

(W/R)- Wellbeing/relationships

(PL)- playing and learning

(LP)Leadership/professionalism

Themes

CA-Children's agency
PIP-Professional identity and practice
CII-Curriculum-intended and implemented

Code number	Code name	Code definition	Category	Theme	Links to RQs
1	Leading learning	Educators taking the lead during taught activities	(ROA)	PIP	1
2	Planning learning	Educators work together to plan activities for children	(C/P)	PIP	1
3	Training-CPD/professional learning	Any form of training undertaken by educators	(LP)	PIP	1

4	Teaching approaches/pedagogy	Strategies used by educators to impart knowledge, to include a range of approaches including direct teaching to individuals, small groups, whole class	(ROA)	PIP	1
5	Planning curriculum activities/areas of the curriculum	Educators devise learning activities for a single area of the curriculum	(C/P)	PIP	1
6	Observing learning	Educators observe children during free play	(ROA)	PIP	1
7	Supporting learning	Educators intervene to provide direct support to a learner(s)	(ROA)	PIP	1
8	Tracking learning	Educators use written methods to document a learner's progress over time	(ROA)	PIP	1
9	Recording/reporting progress	The actual physical record and or report	(CPE)	PIP	1
10	Assessing children's learning	Educators using summative and formative methods to measure progress in learning	(ROA)	PIP	1
11	Covering the curriculum	Activities planned include all curriculum subjects over time	(C/P)	CII	1
12	Adult-initiated curriculum activity	Educator determines the	(RR)	CII/PIP	1

		area of the curriculum to be taught and activity undertaken			
13	Child-initiated curriculum activity	Child determines the area of the curriculum to be taught and activity undertaken	(PL)	CA/CII	3
14	Meeting children's needs	The experiences on offer are designed to ensure all children can learn and achieve successfully	(W/R)	PIP	1
15	Using the environment/resources	Educators and children accessing the learning spaces and physical and human resources	(E)	PIP/CII	1
16	Gaining/acquiring new skills/problem solving	Children through teaching or by their own efforts through play/employing problem solving strategies acquire new skills	(PL)	CA/PIP	1
17	Priming activities/events- bridging topics	Transition programmes designed to support children and families	(PrE)	PIP	4
18	Working with parents- involving/communicating	Planned action by educators to include parents as the first educators of their child	(CPE)	PIP	4
19	Preparing children for	Specific actions	(PrE)	PIP	1

	school	taken by educators to help children understand school routines/structures			
20	Collaborating with educators in school/nursery	Cross sector action by educators	(ROA)	PIP	1
21	Sharing GIRFEC information	Educators share key pieces of sensitive information	(W/R)	PIP	1
22	Ability grouping of children	Children placed in small groups based on academic ability	(RR)	PIP	1
23	Following routines/imposing structures, rules and ways of working	Children are aware and comply with the structures of the day that are in place such as time for tooth brushing, time for group time	(RR)	CA	1
24	Forming/sustaining relationships	Children make friends and try to retain these on entry to school	(W/R)	CA	3
25	Planning involving children's interests	Children contributing their views on what they would like to learn.	(C/P)	CA	3
26	Recognising achievement	Acknowledging success using a range of approaches to include gesture and physical rewards such as stickers	(ROA)	PIP	1
27	Sharing the standard	Educators understand and agree what the	(C/P)	PIP	1

		early level looks like in practice. They talk about what this means for curriculum planning and delivery			
28	Respecting professional judgement	Educators trust the evaluations and information they receive from each other	(LP)	PIP	1
29	Questioning the integrity of professional judgement	Educators do not trust or value the evaluations and information they receive from each other	(LP)	PIP	1
30	Planning for curriculum continuity	Educators in both nursery and school plan together tasks, activities, themes that will support a continuous experience for learners	(C/P)	PIP	1
31	Implementing curriculum continuity	Educators in both nursery and school provide children with access to tasks, activities, themes that support a continuous learning experience building on prior skills and knowledge	(C/P)	PIP	1

Table 4

Process codes-emerging from parents' semi-structured interview transcripts

Categories (in brackets)-emerging from parents' semi-structured interview transcripts

Code number	Code name	Code definition	Category	Theme	Links to RQs
1	Getting on really well-emotionally and socially	Parents' view of the child's adjustment to school	(W)	CA	4
2	Making progress in learning	Parents' view of the child's improving academic position	(PL)	CII	1
3	Learning to write name (lit), to count (num)	Parents' view of the skills the child is gaining	(C)	CII	1
4	Receiving information-orally/written	Parents receive a range of communications from the nursery/school	(CPE)	PIP	1
5	Enjoying nursery/school	Parents' view of the child's response to time they spend in nursery/school	(W)	CA	4
6	Sharing progress	The actual physical record and or report	(CPE)	PIP	1
7	Gaining/acquiring new skills/problem solving	Children through teaching or by their own efforts through play/employing problem solving strategies acquire new skills	(PL)	CA	1
8	Feeling pleased with service provided	Parents state they are happy with the nursery or school provision	(W)	CA	4
9	Covering curriculum content	Activities planned include all curriculum subjects over	(C)	CII	1

		time			
10	Applying knowledge/skills	Children use skills they already possess to help them complete a task or activity that they may have chosen or was directed by an educator	(PL)	CA	1
11	Putting trust in professionals	Parents' belief the educators are more knowledgeable then they are	(CPE)	CA	4
12	Making assumptions about what goes on in nursery/school	Parents' express a view of what they think is happening in the nursery/school	(CPE)	CA	4
13	Learning at home	Children taking part in learning activities at home and are intended as reinforcement of skills gained in nursery/school	(PL)	CII	4
14	Supporting learning/influencing curriculum content in nursery/school (parent)	Planned action by educators to include parents as the first educators of their child	(C)	PIP	3
15	Believing child is ready for school	Parents' assessing their child's readiness for school.	(PrE)	CA	4
16	Expressing a view P/ch	Parents and or children express a specific opinion	(CPE)	CA	3
17	Not receiving information	Parents stating a lack of information	(CPE)	PIP	1
18	Priming events/familiarisation with environments	Transition programmes designed to support children	(PrE)	PIP	4

		and families			
19	Influencing curriculum content (children)	Children through teaching or by their own efforts through play/employing problem solving strategies acquire new skills	(C)	CA	3
20	Looking forward to going to school	Parents' opinion the child is looking forward to going to school	(RR)	CA	4
21	Working across the sectors	Cross sector action by educators	(PrE)	PIP	1
22	Stating a concern/worry	Parents identify a concern they have about their child starting school.	(CPE)	CA	4
23	Feeling nervous/anxious about starting school	Parents' view that their child is anxious or nervous about starting school	(W)	CA	4
24	Making friends	Children make friends and try to retain these on entry to school	(PrE)	CA	4
25	Preparing children for school	Specific actions taken by educators to help children understand school routines/structures	(PrE)	PIP	4
26	Knowing the child as a learner	The experiences on offer are designed to ensure all children can learn and achieve successfully	(W)	PIP	1
27	Working in groups	Children placed in small groups	(RR)	CII	1

		based on academic ability			
28	Choosing opportunities/playing	Children using their own thoughts and intent to take part or not in activities at a time and place of their choosing	(PL)	CA	1
29	Following routines	Children are aware and comply with the structures of the day that are in place such as time for tooth brushing, time for group time	(RR)	CA	1
30	Teaching methods/pedagogy	Strategies used by educators to impart knowledge, to include a range of approaches including direct teaching to individuals, small groups, whole class	(C)	PIP	1
31	Highlighting differences between learning and curriculum in nursery and school.	Educators articulate differences in pedagogy, learning and curriculum between the nursery and school sectors	(C)	CII/PIP	1