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**‘Rules, Rules, Rules and We’re Not  
Allowed to Skip’**

**Lynn J. McNair**

PhD Research

The University of Edinburgh

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Exploratory study: Listening to children’s voices  
about the transition to Primary One.

This signed statement confirms that this thesis, *Rules, Rules, Rules and We're Not Allowed to Skip*, is my own work and that contributions from other sources are duly acknowledged.

Signed

Lynn McNair

September 2016

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## Abstract

Despite the breadth of research on the educational transition of young children, there has been little evidence, in Scotland, of this knowledge impacting on every day practice. The overall contention that emerges from the literature is that some children positively embrace the experience, while others face challenges and risk failure and regression. There is a need for research into the transition from the early years setting to school, which holds promise that the findings will be disseminated to stakeholders locally, nationally and internationally with the aim that the perspectives of young children are heard.

This ethnographic study is an examination of the perspectives of 16 young children as they transition from an early years centre, *Lilybank*, to four primary schools, *Northfield*, *Southfield*, *Eastfield* and *Westfield*, in a Scottish city. Seven key qualitative questions were asked which explored how children, parents and professionals experienced this educational transition.

Data was gathered from empirical methods such as participant observations, mind-mapping sessions, interviews and documentation – e.g., council procedures and school handbooks. Participant observations took place in the early years setting and the participating schools. Most of the interviews took place in the children's homes, or in a convenient environment for the family, such as a local cafeteria.

An analysis of the data shows that *power* is a central concept in understanding transitions. The voices of children, and their families, are often silenced by policy-makers, bureaucrats and professionals during the process, or overshadowed and undermined by mainstream procedures. Children are expected to become acquiescent, adjusting to coercive practices used in the school institution. However, the findings also show that some children find ways to creatively resist organisation.

Unique life journeys involve differences and from their individual experiences, children construct elaborate knowledge. The views of children can (and do) add nuance to our understanding of how power impacts on their transition experience. Children's accounts of discipline strategies used by the schools were insightful. The concept of power is under-theorised and under-explored in transitions. This study, therefore, adds to the growing body of transition research. Further, the findings of

this study stress the need for policy makers and institutions to reflect on and question the complex role of power in young children's transitions.

## Glossary of terms

The following glossary contains some of the key terms used in this thesis.

**Buddy System** – The ‘buddy’ system is set up in most primary schools in the city where this research took place. A ‘buddy’ is an older child in the school (usually Primary Seven) who offers friendship and support to a Primary One child. This is to help new children have a welcoming experience when starting school, but the practice also benefits the older pupil as he or she takes on more responsibility.

**Early Years Collaborative (2014)** – The main objective of this national exercise is to deliver tangible improvements in outcomes and reduce inequalities for Scotland’s ‘vulnerable’ children. It also aims to put Scotland on course to shift the balance of public services toward early intervention and prevention by 2016 (*The Collaborative*, 2014).

**Early Years Setting** – Refers to the education and care centre.

**Education Scotland** – Works in partnership with local authorities to identify and agree areas of professional learning relating to wellbeing and positive relationships. Education Scotland works on a ‘training the trainer’ model to build capacity within the local authority to develop their own Continued Professional Development (CPD) programme. Education Scotland advises but cannot tell local authorities how they should engage with training and development of policy and practice.

**Family** – Refers to the network of people around the child, in whatever way the family is organised. This could involve siblings, parents, partners of parents, grandparents and any other key adults in a child’s life.

**Golden Time** – Golden Time is based on a reward and punishment approach (Frost 2006). The power to define what is, and what is not, appropriate behaviour is in the hands of adults. These mechanisms are based on Skinner’s (1974) notions of reward and punishment. The assumption by adults is that children will ‘naturally’ behave badly without extrinsic rewards.

**Local Authority** – Public sector activity at a local level in designated geographical areas.

**Mind–mapping** – Mind–mapping is a tool used in the early years to explore children’s thoughts, feelings and suggestions. Children are invited to answer a question. Their responses are then captured in a visual way. Responses are checked for clarity.

**Parent** – Parent refers to mothers and fathers, as well as carers or key adults who have responsibility for the child.

**Practitioner** – Practitioner is used in this thesis to describe all staff who have achieved Early Years Professional status (qualified to HNC in Childcare and Education, or above) and work with children from 0–5 years. Practitioners are registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) regulatory body.

**Priming Events** – Events that prepare the children for the sociocultural context of the new school, such as visits to the school and the introduction of school practices, for example, encouraging children to sit and listen in groups.

**Professional** – When I refer to professional, I mean any non-familial adult who works in early years and primary school settings.

**Quality Improvement Officer** – Quality Improvement Officers (QIO) from the local authority work with staff in all education sectors – early, primary and secondary. The main role of the QIO is to provide advice and support.

**Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)** – SEAL is a whole–school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills which underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and wellbeing of all who learn and work in schools.

**Stakeholders** – The term stakeholder here refers to anyone who is concerned with the educational experiences of children, including the children themselves, parents, families, community members and practitioners working with children.

**The Scottish Advisory Group on Behaviour in Schools (SAGBIS)** – SAGBIS is a group of representatives from various organisations which gives guidance to national and local government about behaviour in Scotland’s schools.

**Teacher** – The term teacher is used in this thesis to describe professionals registered by the regulatory body, the General Teaching Council.

**Time Out** – an intervention of short duration in which undesired behaviours are eliminated by not being reinforced.

## Chapter One: Introduction

After the family, it could be argued that school has a profound influence on the lived experience of the child. The child is likely to embark on an incredible learning journey, one that will be accompanied by successes and (perceived) failures, where his or her interests will be turned on and off, and where relationships, particularly friendships, will be made and unmade (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry et al., 2000; Peters, 2010a; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Griebel & Niesel, 2013).

There appear to be two prevalent views of the child in the early years setting and the school. In early years thinking, childhood is the innocent period and freedom and innocence are stressed (Bruce et al., 2012). In school thinking, the child becomes a culture and knowledge producer (Moss, 2014). In the latter case, transition to school becomes of critical importance to the young child, as it can be a predictor of school success (Sayer et al., 2012).

It has been argued that in schools where authoritative discourse permeates pedagogy there is a focus on subjects, while the early years setting is centred on the child (White, 2016). This perspective suggests that as the child enters the school, he or she is expected to fit into existing, homogenous and relatively static programs and systems, such as a grade-based curriculum and continued assessment (Dahlberg & Taguchi, 1994; Meade, 2000; Jordan, 2004), and that children have much to cope with when transitioning to school such as changes in relationships, teaching style, space, time, context for learning and learning itself (Einard, 2003, OECD, 2006; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007).

Before embarking on the Scope of this Study it is critical to inform the reader at this early point that this study was an exploratory study; and that the study was explored in an organic manner due to the ethnographic approach which was applied at all phases of the research process.

### 1.1 The scope of this study

This research aimed to explore the multiple perspectives and voices which children have on their educational transition from an early years setting, *Lilybank*, to four primary schools, *Northfield*, *Westfield*, *Eastfield* and *Southfield* in a Scottish city.

There has been a growing body of research into transition to school carried out in the past 30 years (Chambon & Irving, 1994; Brostrom, 2002; Dunlop, 2002; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Griebel & Niesal, 2003 and others), which has focused broadly on three key issues concerning transition – the continuity of curriculum from pre-school settings, the standards and expectations of children’s cognitive development and the acquisition of a range of knowledge skills and dispositions (e.g. Brostrom, 2002; Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Taylor, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2013).

This research has tended to be psychological in nature – however, there has also been an increasing shift towards identifying the socially constructed nature of transition, where children are active constructs of social and cultural processes, and towards a rejection of preparing children for school adjustment (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Fabian, 2007; Vogler et al., 2008).

Whilst reading this wealth of transition research I became aware that it had not necessarily informed everyday practice in the local authority in which I worked. Transition processes appeared to be something *done to* children and not *with* children (Tudge et al, 2009). There also appeared to be a lack of research with children and their families on what age children should start school, even though literature has emerged that argued that not all children develop at the same pace and that developmental capacity rather than chronological age should be the marker for children starting school (Kagan, 2007; Peters, 2010; Moss, 2014).

In my local authority, young children also experience standardised testing on entry to primary school (e.g. York Assessment in Reading & Comprehension (YARC); Progress in Maths, PIM). The results of this testing are not known to the children or the parents. As a result of these tests, children are grouped with other classmates who attained a similar score. *When* children start school was raised as an area of interest by children, parents and staff members and is explored in this thesis (Chapter Four).

The importance of this distinction raises questions which this study explores through the multiple perspectives and voices of children transitioning from an early years setting. By investigating children’s perspectives, this study contributes to a critical discussion of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bioecological theory, which is often

used as a starting point for theorising on transition (MacDonald et al., 2014). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory may be unparalleled in theorising on transitions when children are considered as having 'good ecology'. Nonetheless, current constructions of culture would suggest that this theory ignores the differences in diversity, complexity and irregularity which occur in the individual lives of children (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005).

A key similarity across the literature is the recognition that transition brings both opportunities and challenges (Chapter Two), with some children experiencing an enhanced sense of their own competence (Dunlop, 2002), while others experience feelings of being overwhelmed (Fthenakis & Textor, 1998). However, what appears to be lacking in the literature is research on the instrumental role of power, which analyses how power contributes to the way that children negotiate the opportunities and challenges of transition. Hence, this thesis seeks to make the force of power visible to the reader in a way that other studies on transition have not.

It has been suggested that schools are places where authoritative discourse permeates pedagogy (Moss, 2014) – that a school is a political structure (Gallagher, 2004). It is argued that schools as institutions operate through hierarchical means and are a context for the exercise of power. How power operates in transition processes is more specifically discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

However, Chapter Two considers the key issues that arose for my study from the literature on power. For example, some authors (e.g. Foucault, 1977; 1980; 1981; Gore, 1995) advocate a fluid approach to power, which suggests that power is in constant flux in how it is enacted and interpreted, within and between individuals. Building on this conception, this study utilises Chapters Four, Five and Six to argue that where there is totalising power, there is also evidence of resistance.

Furthermore, and critical to this thesis, tentative connections have been made between Foucault and Bakhtin that arose out of the analysis and were not established at the outset. The attempt to align these philosophical informants may be full of caveats, but nonetheless offers a distinct and new way of thinking.

Taking all this into consideration, this study reveals that the ways in which children experience transition do not happen in separation, but are influenced by their peers, parents and professionals, and the contexts they inhabit, such as policies



and legislation. In the following section I highlight the research questions which this study aims to answer. I then provide some background knowledge about this wider social and political context within which the research took place.

## **1.2 The research questions**

As mentioned above this was an exploratory, organic study. In order to help the reader understand the context from which the questions emerged it is important to highlight at this introductory point that the research questions were not fixed at the outset but emerged as the study processed. For example, an exploration of the literature in Chapter Two informed some of the questions asked; but also in Chapter Three as I write of Foucault and Bakhtin, questions emerged as I explored the viewpoints of those philosophers; and importantly the data, Chapters, Four, Five and Six illuminated research questions. I have attempted to provide the reader with occasional reminders of the research questions throughout this thesis.

Given the privileged nature of adults' views on the transition process, I set out to gather children's multiple perspectives on transition, both verbal and gestural (Bakhtin, 1993). Alongside the children's views, I gathered perspectives from family members and professionals, but it was of critical importance that the views of adults were not privileged over those of children.

The following questions were explored:

1. *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?*
2. *Are professional approaches to transition flexible or rigid?*
3. *How do children navigate the complexity of transition?*
4. *How fluid are the power relations in transition?*
5. *What happens when children arrive at school?*
6. *What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition and change?*
7. *How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?*

The seven questions explored in this study have been numbered in no particular order of importance, and at times will be analysed in sequentially.

### **1.3 Background and context**

Over the past decade, debates about the quality of education and transition, in particular the school starting age, have been firmly on the Scottish Government's agenda (Crinic & Lamberty, 1994; Gorton, 2012). It is therefore important to understand the policy and context. In my view, educational policy and transition are closely interwoven and cannot be separated. To illustrate my point, I draw specifically from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD (2006), which reported:

A more unified approach to learning should be adopted in both the early childhood education and the primary school systems, and that attention should be given to transition challenges faced by young children as they enter school... Facilitating transitions for children is a policy challenge in all systems. Transitions for children are generally a stimulus to growth and development, but if too abrupt and handled without care they carry, particularly for young children – the risk of regression and failure (OECD, 2006:1).

Accordingly, exploring transition has become a vibrant subject, as policy-makers view it as a distinct and prominent feature of academic success in young children. Thus, it is now acknowledged that young children's transitions cannot be abstracted from any discourses about their educational experience (OECD, 2006). To capture a fuller representation of how educational policy impacts on transition, in the following paragraphs I have provided the reader with information that may provide some insight into my claim that educational policy and transition are interwoven.

Since devolution, the Scottish Government has had powers for education and child family policy (The Scottish Parliament, 1998) which sit apart from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Scottish education system has well-defined features, such as its own national curriculum. Concern about the achievement gap identified by the OECD introduced the case for change (OECD, 2007). This included

the aspiration to address child poverty and educational disadvantage, and make Scotland the best place in the world for a child to grow up. This aspiration has driven cross-party consensus to fundamentally change Scottish education (Warden & McNair, 2016).

The development began with ‘The National Debate’ (Munn et al., 2004), where the people of Scotland were invited to consider ‘*What do you want from our education system?*’ The Scottish people responded by saying that they wanted a curriculum which invites complexity and uncertainty, that enables children to be ‘successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors’ (Scottish Executive, 2004). The acknowledgement that ‘learners today have to cope with super-complexity, uncertainty and the need to produce, as well as use knowledge’ inspired the curriculum (Edwards, 2001:174).

What followed was a time of deliberation on how ‘successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors’ would be delivered through the curriculum design (Education Scotland, 2010). Near the beginning of this process, the effectiveness of learning in the early years was acknowledged and a paper on Active Listening was published (The Scottish Government, 2007). Of significance, this work commended the engagement and experiences found in early years practice and strove to extend this throughout the curriculum across the sectors. With learning now considered as continuous, how children transitioned became an important consideration for policy-makers and educationalists.

Seven design features were developed – personalisation and choice, challenge and enjoyment, breadth, depth, progression, relevance and coherence (Scottish Executive, 2004). Alongside these were entitlements for all children and young people to a broad education, personal support and additional support for learning (The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009). The curriculum design was set out in a series of publications, such as *Building the Curriculum 1: A contribution to curriculum areas* (2006); *Building the Curriculum 2: Active learning in the early years* (2007); *Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching* (2008); *Building the Curriculum 4: Skills for learning, skills for life, skills for work* (2009); *Building the Curriculum 5*. Additionally, a further document was produced, *A Curriculum for Excellence*

*Through Outdoor Learning* (The Scottish Government 2010), which outlined governmental expectations that all children were entitled to daily outdoor education opportunities.

Therefore, the aspirational aim of the Curriculum for Excellence (2004) (CfE) was to achieve transformation in education in Scotland by providing an enriched, open-ended, coherent and more flexible curriculum. The concept of transition is now viewed as being at the heart of this coherence and flexibility. For example, in the self-evaluation tools used by educational establishments, e.g. *How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare* (HGIOELC) (Education Scotland, 2016 (a)) and *How Good in Our School (4)* (HGIOS,4) (Education Scotland, 2015, a), one of the 15 quality indicators (QIs) evaluates educational transitions.

Drawing from the curriculum, eight areas were developed; expressive arts, health and wellbeing, languages, mathematics, religious and moral education, science, social studies and technologies (Education Scotland, 2016 (b)). Curriculum subjects that were historically separate in primary and secondary school were now combined. This meant a profound shift in practice for the early years sector (Cooke & Lawton, 2008), which was accustomed to five areas based on child development: emotional, personal and social development; communication and language; knowledge and understanding of the world; expressive and aesthetic development; and physical development and movement (The Scottish Government, 2016 no pagination).

Progression in the curriculum was to be accomplished through experiences and outcomes at the early, first, second, third and senior stage. The early level included children from the age of three to six years, which suggested a more unified approach between early childhood settings and school. Importantly, it has been widely established that the transition from pre-school to the first year of primary school is aided by a continuity of learning experiences (Skouteris, Watson & Lum, 2012). Consequently, the unified approach of the Curriculum for Excellence (2004) should support transition.

An attempt at inspiring transformational change can also be found in the *Growing Up in Scotland Report* (GUS, 2003). Assigned in 2003 by the then Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED), *Growing Up in Scotland* (GUS) is a large-scale longitudinal study into the lives of several cohorts of Scottish children and their

families, from early years and beyond. GUS is funded by the Scottish Government and is conducted by ScotCen Social Research, in collaboration with the Centre of Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) at the University of Edinburgh and the MRC Social and Public Health Services Unit at Glasgow University (GUS, 2016).

The main aim of the GUS study is to offer information to support policy-making in Scotland. This information is also available to academics; state, private and voluntary sector organisations; and other interested groups. The overall aspiration from GUS is that Scottish children will have the very best start in life (GUS, 2003, 2014).

I have looked at the GUS report because it has three findings of significance to transition processes – that deferred entry to school is often linked to parents' concerns about child development; that pre-school attendance at an early years setting is beneficial in preparing children for school; and that early intervention techniques support children's needs ahead of primary school (The Scottish Government, 2012).

In a further attempt to make the transformational changes aspired to, the Scottish Government made a major investment in the Early Years Change Fund. This investment gives precedence to young children and their families, and early intervention strategies.

The aspirational aim that Scottish children will have the very best start in life propelled *The Early Years Collaborative* (2014) (*The Collaborative*). *The Collaborative* (2014) is a Scottish Government initiative which empowers agencies to work together using a scientific model of change to improve outcomes for children and their families (The Scottish Government, 2012).

*The Collaborative* (2014) has laid out transition as one of ten key elements of transformational change. It encourages practitioners to take appropriate measures to develop and promote particular 'tests' that are quantifiable in giving a standardised measure of effectiveness in producing standardised outcomes.

A successful outcome is defined in terms of 'bundles', for example, how many children have achieved a particular outcome. *The Collaborative* (2014) has three controlled and calculated stretch aims (conceived wholly from an adult perspective),

one of which is to ‘ensure 85 per cent of all children reach all of the expected developmental milestones’ (Scottish Government, 2015, no pagination).

*The Collaborative* (2014) is mainly concerned with child development and educational attainment of the future child (Moss, 2014), with the age of the child viewed as the sole determinant of ability (Tymms et al., 2005). Within the aims of *The Collaborative* (2014), children are expected to reach specific developmental milestones by the time they start primary school, between the ages of 4.5 – 5.5 years (Scottish Government, 2015). The principal focus of developmental milestones is to identify what is *normal* development for each age group. The expected behaviours take place in a sequence of stages, with the curriculum planned to facilitate, enhance and maximise achievement.

Therefore, a culture of enforced efficiency and ever-increasing demands on the academic achievement of children has begun to take priority over other social, moral or physical elements of the curriculum. It is through the lens of these quantitative measures that governments and teachers now attribute success, despite not being tacitly the most important aspects for the development of a child (White, 2011).

This ‘measuring’ of children impacts on the transition process as children are tested on arrival to school. The potential is for uniformity and normalisation of thought and practice being inscribed in pedagogical work and, consequently, transition practices where a ‘dictatorship with no alternatives’ may be imposed upon children (Unger, 2005:1). *The Collaborative* (2014) and how it impacts on transition has relevance to this thesis.

As mentioned, issues of transition are high on the agenda in Scotland. However, despite initiatives such as the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) and *Early Years Collaborative* (2014), there is a tension here. On one hand, there is a drive to provide a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum that mirrors the values of wisdom, justice, integrity and compassion (The Scottish Parliament, 2016). But, on the other hand, children are to be controlled, calculated and measured, reaching 85 per cent of expected developmental milestones prior to going to school. This achievement is identified as a matter of urgency (*The Collaborative*, 2014).

The incompatible nature of policy-makers’ disparate philosophical orientations are highlighted by how the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) – which is underpinned

by a belief that learning does not proceed in a linear way and is intended to invoke wonder and passion – contrasts with the *Early Years Collaborative* (2014), which presents an image of an impoverished child, one that is to be ‘tested’ for knowledge from a top–down mandated curriculum (Moriarty et al., 2001; Lyksaker & Furuness, 2011).

The latter technological approach to education impacts on transition as early years professionals are under pressure from school authorities and policy-makers to reach curriculum goals and test results (*The Collaborative*, 2014). This tension involves changes in pedagogy, values and beliefs. Early years settings take the approach that learning is unique, situational, creative, unexpected, personal, eventful, capricious, emergent, collective and inspirational.

This contrasts with technological understanding of learning as ‘...standard, decontextualised, impersonal, routinised, assigned, technical and goal–orientated’ (Matalov, 2011:40). Early years practitioners were once free to disregard institutionally-set educational goals. This is now changing.

It could be argued that, *The Collaborative* (2014) produces and imposes a regime of truth that exercises power over professional thoughts and actions. If all children have to learn the same things prior to going to school, fuelled by the relentless pursuit of ensuring they are at the same level at the same time – what space is left for diversity in processes of transition? Are schools developing revolutionary pedagogic techniques, or are they simply ‘tinkering with the established system’ (Unger, 2004: viii)? According to Chia (1999), the ‘element of surprise’ is necessary in transformational change, otherwise transformation is superficial (Chia, 1999:223).

At issue then is that Scottish policy and practice appear paradoxical. There does not appear to be a universally agreed meaning on what policy-makers want for the children of Scotland. As transition is governed by policies, this tension impacts on how approaches to transition are practised. This makes Scotland an interesting context in which to explore children’s perspectives on transition.

## 1.4 A Childhood Studies perspective

This thesis is also located within the field of Childhood Studies. It is a field that encompasses a wide range of disciplines in an attempt to understand children and childhoods, and draws from anthropology, the history of childhood, children's literature, the philosophy of children, psychology and sociology. This enables Childhood Studies researchers and professionals to challenge familiar understandings of children and question what was formerly thought evident, such as age and stage theory (Piaget, 1970). This view moves away from the one-dimensional linear reductive thinking that can occur when trying to understand children through one dominant discipline, for example, developmental psychology (Woodhead, 2006).

Development psychology has left a dominant legacy of children as *succeeding* or *failing* in developmental milestones (Prout, 2002). However, this does not mean that developmental psychology can be discarded as the new way of thinking overtakes the old. There is room for different disciplines and all are valued for the contributions they make to understanding children (Prout, 2002). This means Childhood Studies brings about a state of continuous questioning, where dominant understandings of children are shaken up and new understandings of children are not predetermined. As Bakhtin (1993) says, individuals are diverse, complex and irregular, not fixed entities but full of surprise, possibilities and potentialities.

From a Childhood Studies perspective, 'childhood' is viewed as a social construct. Notions of 'being' and 'becoming' are intrinsic to Childhood Studies (Uprichard, 2008). Fundamental to Childhood Studies is the ontological belief that children are human beings and not adults in the making; children are viewed as competent social actors who are actively involved in the construction of their experiences. (Qvortrup, 1994; Hart & Schwab, 1997; Prout & James, 1999; Moss 2014). Such participation has significant potential for children's self-development and political agency. Consequently, within the Childhood Studies discipline, children are perceived as active researchers (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Tisdall et al., 2009).

This view has shifted in the wake of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) towards an acknowledgment that children are social actors in their own right. Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC call for children to be



consulted, involved and informed on matters that affect them (U.N. General Assembly, 1989, also Siraj & Kingston, 2015). This has led to more Childhood Studies researchers inviting children to participate as competent contributors to the process (Hill et al., 2004). Consequently, researchers adopt ethnography as an appropriate methodological approach when studying children (James, 2004). Ethnography provokes engagement with children's own perspectives and facilitates their views to be rendered accessible to adults and other children.

## 1.5 Navigating this thesis

In the remainder of this thesis I respond to the research questions. The purpose of Chapter Two is to broadly establish the literature on transition. A truly comprehensive view is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis so I have limited my research to four main areas: *Transition is a natural stage related to biological age (child development)*; *Transition involves universal structures around the child (cultural, ecological and material)*; *Transition involves a sense of loss of human and spatial connections (locational, relational and emotional)* and *Transition involves power (totalising and resistance)*.

Chapter Three provides an account of how I carried out my research within a poststructuralist perspective, one that examines the possibility of 'truth', 'objectivity' and 'progress' (Peters, 1999; Dahlberg et al., 2007; White 2016). I argue that, instead of a 'single' truth, multiple truths exist and many interpretations are possible. All actions, knowledge, and subjectivities are socially constructed and culturally produced. I acknowledge the complexity and diversity of real situations. Accordingly, I set the scene for an approach to investigation which is underpinned by listening. Chapter Three also provides an analysis and justification of my theoretical perception for my choice of methodology. Much care was taken to ensure the data was comprehensively examined for alternative meanings, to ensure that my research could be recognised as having wide-ranging relevance.

Chapters Four, Five and Six draw on the findings of this study and apply them to the overarching research questions. They also illustrate my analytical points taken from ethnographic examples; my empirical data captures the perspectives of

children, parents and professionals and their changing experiences as they travel from one space to another.

Finally, Chapter Seven presents my analysis followed by a conclusion. Drawing together the empirical work presented in the thesis, I illustrate how I have answered the questions posed at the outset. I end with some suggestions for future research which have emerged from my explorations.

## Chapter Two: Introduction to the literature review

By immersing myself in the literature over the six years of this part-time thesis, I found a vast wealth of scholarship dedicated to transition research, which has covered topics such as *Ecological/Bioecological Theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner, 2001); *Family Development Theory* (Duvall & Miller, 1985); *Six Stages of Parenthood* (Galinsky, 1987); *Situated Learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991); *Life Course Perspective* (Glen & Elder, 1998); *Rites of Passage* (Van Maanen, 1998); *Rites of Institution* (Bourdieu, 1991); *Border Crossings* (Campbell Clark, 2000); *Induction into New Cultures* (Brooker, 2002); *Intent Participation* (Rogoff, 2003) *Agency* (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998); *Priming Events* (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005); and *Transitions as Capital* (Dunlop, 2015a).

Research of this breadth requires specific limitations to be manageable and a complete exploration of each theoretical approach is beyond the scope of this thesis. I have therefore chosen to divide the literature into four broad themes which reflect transition literature concentrating on the young child's educational experience from early years to school entry.

I have not explored transition research in middle or upper primary and secondary schools, for example Giddens, 1984; Freydenburgh & Lewis; Carr, 2001; Claxton, 2002, and so on. Furthermore, I have not explored, in any depth, transitions which look at family contexts. My focus has been on the transition of children aged 4.5 years to 5.5 years from an early years setting to primary school.

This chapter explores three themes in the literature on transition. The first theme, *Transition is a natural stage related to biological age (child development)*, explores how much of the literature places a special emphasis on *when* children start school, and employs age to define the school child (Palsdottir, 2010). I argue in this section, that policy-makers rely consistently on the inherently conservative developmental psychology discourse and that specific policies have employed this discourse when producing milestones for expected linear progression from immaturity to adult competence (e.g. *The Collaborative*, 2014).

In developmental psychology, the physical and mental growth of the child are understood to be separate entities (Lewin, 1943; Parson & Bales, 1955; Werner, 1957; Freud, 1962; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Piaget, 1970; Heider, 1971, and

others). This section connects the child development paradigm to positivistic and analytic approaches that *privileges* professional discourses on childhood, ignore children's abilities, inhibit professionals from seriously listening to children's views, and overlook the importance and significance of children's views on transition.

The second theme, *Transition involves universal structures around the child (cultural, ecological and material)*, is rooted in the writings of Urie Bronfenbrenner and his ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) and his bioecological systems theory continues to influence current trends of transition. This section suggests that there is a notable absence of children (and their parents) as interdependent partners within Bronfenbrenner's theory. Children are treated inappropriately as a commodity and that a more theoretical basis for transition may be possible – which includes all children, who are diverse and complex, and not simply those with 'good ecology'.

The final theme: *Transition involves a sense of loss of human and spatial connections (relational)* engages with the ideas of Fabian and Dunlop (2002), who explore the loss children may experience in moving from one context to another (Peters, 2010a). This section also draws from Rogoff's (2003) work to move from constructions of the individual child to perspectives that view the child as a member of a community. This section also critiques the idea that there is a homogenised child and suggests that, whilst some children experience loss when going to school, others may embrace the opportunity (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Hartley et al., 2012).

## **2.1 Transition is a natural stage related to biological age (child development)**

The Education Act 1870 made education compulsory in Scotland from the age of five years. The school starting age remains the same today as it did in the 19th century. With a single annual intake in August, children in Scotland can begin primary school anywhere between 4.5 years and 5.5 years (Fields, 1997). It has been argued that schooling controls and organises children (Fendler, 2011). This perspective suggests that the demarcation of age is the sole determinant of ability and/or performance (Tymms et al., 2005).

This position can be used to define educational transition as the process of change which children make from one place, or phase of education, to another (Christensen, 1998; Pianta & Cox, 1999, Dockett & Perry, 2001, Fabian & Dunlop, 2002). The age at which children make their educational transition has always been controversial (Moss, 2006); in many parts of the world the statutory requirement for starting school is much later (*Figure 1*).

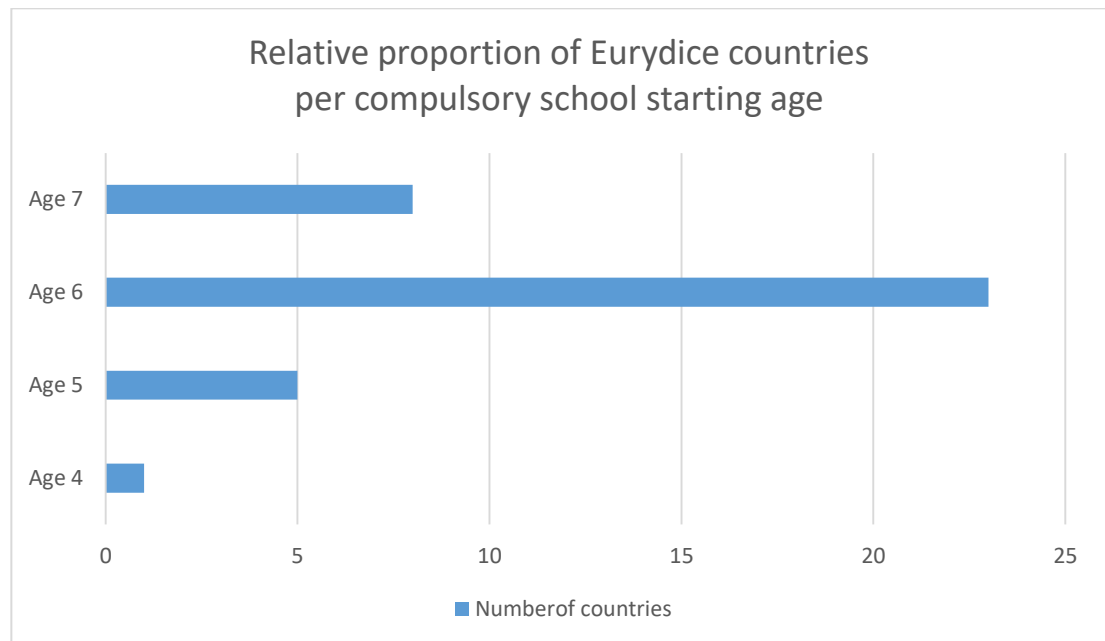


Figure 1: Compulsory School Starting Age in Eurydice Countries

Debates on the educational issue of when children should start formal learning have a habit of recurring. However, Brooker (2008) suggests there has been some progress in thinking by policy-makers:

School starts at five? Well then, that must be the appropriate age for children to get on with their learning. But there are now signs that policy-makers are responding to research evidence about children's transitions, and rethinking some of the enshrined beliefs and practices. As a result, some governments have begun to blur the boundaries between age-phases, and create more continuity from early into middle childhood. (Brooker, 2008: 89–90).

The findings from Brooker (2008) indicate that changes to transition policies were, in recent times, being considered. However, somewhat ironically, flexible approaches to the starting age have meant that some parents, and professionals, have been encouraged to send children to school at a younger age (Small, 2011). This raises questions concerning the extent to which parents' views on transition fit with contemporary ideas concerning a later starting age. It also raises questions about the relationship between professionals and parents concerning decision-making on issues of transition.

A standardised school starting age originated from the development of mass schooling in the 19th century. In the same period, the practices of child psychology, developmental linguistics and anthropometry (the study of human body measurements) provided pictures of what children were like and how they should be expected to look at certain stages (James, 2000). From this standardised notion of childhood a variety of social, political and educational ideological reforms were woven. The expectation was that, by primary school age, all children would arrive at a similar stage of development at the same time and would have developed a necessary repertoire of skills and abilities to begin formal education (Kellett et al., 2004; Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Taylor., 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2013).

For Dewey (1916, 1922), these capacities were described as 'knowing', 'understanding', 'judging' and 'behaving intelligently' (Pring, 2000:12). In addition, these capacities were underpinned by a general agreement that children must be socially and emotionally mature enough to fulfil school requirements (Okon & Wilgocka-Okon, 1973). The child was therefore expected to achieve a fixed standard of 'behaving intelligently' on school entry. Despite the rise in the 1990s of the sociology of childhood, this standardised approach may still hold sway (Prout, 2002, GUS, 2003, 2014; *The Collaborative*, 2014).

There is currently an expectation for Early Childhood Practitioners to symbiotically plan transition in ways guided by a developmental programme; here the child is viewed as a redemptive actor who can be programmed for school (Moss, 2014). The developmental programme is put into practice during the child's pre-school year through processes which closely monitor and measure children against expected norms.

For example, the council literacy and maths programmes (discussed in more detail in Chapter Four) are designed to facilitate, enhance and maximise the normal attainment of children based on their biological age. Practitioners are expected to complete developmental milestone check-lists four times each year for each child. Developmental milestones are explained by Gesell as the stages by which *normal* children can accomplish different tasks (Gesell, 1925; Gesell & Ilg, 1946). Therefore, through physiologically defined chronology, children are expected to reach certain outcomes as they make their way through stages of growth. According to Woodhead (2006):

A developmental perspective emphasises regularities in young children's physical and psychosocial growth during early childhood, as well as their dependencies and vulnerabilities during this formative phase (Woodhead, 2006:4).

Under this approach, the child is viewed as deficient – an immature and dependent infant who is on the journey to adulthood where they will, subsequently, reach a state of rational moral autonomy (Mussen, 1984; Ryan, 1971; Anderson 2010).

Age is commonly used as a delineating factor within discussions about childhood competence (Kellet et al., 2004). The notion of the child as an immature infant who is on their journey to adulthood can be found in the *age* and *stage* theory of developmental psychologist Jean Piaget (Piaget, 1929; 1936; 1962; 1963). According to Piaget, children pass through an unvaried sequence of four distinct stages.

These are: sensorimotor – birth to two years (here, the mental structures are mainly concerned with the mastery of concrete objects); preoperational – two years to seven years (the mastery of symbols); concrete operational – seven years to 11 years (children learn mastery in reasoning); and formal operational – 11 years upwards. According to Piaget, it is at this point that truly abstract reasoning develops. In Piaget's way of thinking, children as young as nine or 10 years could reason in logical and systematic ways about the world. Notably, a child cannot skip through stages – nor can they reorder them. However, Piaget accepted that children may vary in the ages at which they attain each stage. He also stressed that there are

developmental risks if the child is hurried in the process. By imposing too much too soon on the child, they can become overwhelmed and stressed in the process (Elkind, 1981).

Piaget's ideas have been criticised on the basis that reason is a more complex phenomenon and that human beings have more diverse and fluid abilities than his work suggests. For example, it was argued that a physicist's abilities to carry out 'formal operations' such as logic lie in a specific domain and this does not mean that they have mastered all other aspects of what it is to be a human being, such as the ability to act in ethical ways (Coleman, 2002). This critique raised questions for this thesis on whether more complex positions and approaches could be adopted on transition and what alternatives there might be to the 'natural age stage' approach.

### **2.1.1 Critique of natural age stages**

In contrast to the notion of natural stages, it has been argued that not all children develop at the same pace, and developmental capacity rather than chronological age should be the marker for children starting school (Kagan, 2007). In support of this shift away from age criteria, the Gillick-competence ruling (1985) emphasised that it is not chronological age at all which determines competence amongst children, but sufficient understanding and intelligence to comprehend what is being proposed (Kellett et al., 2004).

Similarly, it has been argued that what distinguishes children is the capacity to adapt to new situations and experiences, not as organisms simply through biological adaption, but through conceptualising problems and possible situations (Dewey, 1916, 1922). In this way the young child is thought to grow into the intellectual life of the school, where practitioners facilitate learning and development by putting the child in contact with further experiences. This approach is defined as 'guided participation' and/or 'intent participation' (Rogoff 2003). It is suggested that guided participation, if unhurried, 'seems to give excellent results...without undue pressure to achieve a pre-specified level of knowledge or proficiency at a given age' (Moss & Woodhead, 2007: 60).



This more contemporary developmental psychological view – that young children benefit from building relationships, experiencing guidance, and receiving support from adults (Wood, 1988; Rogoff, 1990; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Woodhead, 1999; Smith, 2002; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry et al., 2000; Peters, 2010a; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Griebel & Niesel, 2013 as discussed below) – is shared by writers in other paradigms (e.g. Qvortrup 1994, James & Prout 1999, Prout 2002, Bakhtin, 1993, White & Peters, 2011). Yet while sharing these similarities, there is still considerable disagreement about the nature of developmental psychology and its practical implications. For example, it is argued that the ‘adult support’ discourse obscures power relationships in childhood which skews the balance of power towards adult perspectives and overemphasises the nurturing needs of childhood (Elkin, 1960; Denzin, 1977).

Bakhtin (1993, also White, Peters, 2011) goes further to suggest a completely different method to enabling children, such as a dialogic approach. Bakhtin’s central notion of dialogue challenges a monologist/developmental approach to working with children, where the adult’s privileged voice dominates the child’s lived experiences and developmental outcomes. A dialogic approach opens up the potential for creativity as it disrupts continuity and is a means of both affirming and disrupting identity (White & Peters, 2011).

Bakhtin (1993) argues that we should not be trying to finalise children, as a developmental approach does. Bakhtin says (1981; 1993 and White & Peters, 2011) that children are ideologically ‘becoming’ and are only finalised at the point of death. A dialogic approach, therefore, challenges the intentions of policy makers to homogenise children at school entry and values the creative ways in which children learn (White & Peters, 2011). This approach advances the idea that work with young children should be a shared process, where the child has a strong agentic role to play in their own learning (White, 2016). It is argued that if children have authority over their own learning then notions of developmental delay would have less currency (Rose, 1999).

This developmental psychology argument raised questions about how adult power affects the transition process. While child development has contributed greatly to the

*construction* of childhood, it has been argued that by overemphasising vulnerabilities such as immaturity and incompetence, this approach tends to promote a negative view of childhood that underplays children's abilities. This calls for us to see through the erroneous and dangerous illusions of adult dominance (Davis, 2011) and recognise that adult-focused practice may inhibit professionals from taking children's views seriously by downplaying their importance.

A range of critics (Donaldson, 1978, Ingelby, 1974; Henriques et al., 1984; Prout, 2005) have argued that developmental psychology is 'adultist', viewing the child as passive or as a resistant participant. Denzin (1977) states:

...the child, like other actors, can enter into the organisation of its own developmental sequence, bypassing certain stages, regressing to others, and perhaps creating stages or phases that have yet to be imagined (Denzin, 1977: 10).

Such authors question the idea that there is a universal/factual childhood and that 'rational adults' should define the criteria of children's normal development. They also cast doubt on practices that rigidly dictate the domains of development, such as writing, reading and mathematics. They argue that what counts as rational is dependent upon agreements between people and that such agreements can only be reached through negotiation. This writing also suggests that the process of negotiating an agreed position in relation to professional practices concerning childhood can be problematic if negotiations are skewed according to who wields the most power (Pring, 2000).

It has also been suggested that the developmental discourse normalises children (Moss & Woodhead, 2007). Writing that is sceptical of this (e.g. MacNaughton, 2003, 2005) argues that normative assumptions constrain lives by inherently labelling, isolating and excluding some children. In agreement, writers of disability studies argue that disabled children, when viewed through the child development lens, are often seen as 'passive, vulnerable and dependent' (Davis & Watson, 2002). However, Davis and Watson (2002) contend that this characterisation cannot go unchallenged, and that disabled children should be assumed competent by right (also Alderson & Goodey, 1996).

It is also argued that child development discourses lead us to expect children to conform to our view of natural development and childhood, oversimplify childhood and, in early years settings, form regimes of truth that create presumptions about how children should think, act and feel (Moss, 2014). It is further argued that children are viewed in deterministic ways and moulded to *fit into* society (Davis 2011). Waksler (2003) maintains:

‘Statements drawn from the natural sciences about children’s abilities and inabilities may well serve as blinders, preventing a recognition of what children can do, especially those that do that which science tends to assume they cannot’ (Waksler, 2003: 18).

This suggests an uncritical use of the child development paradigm can influence professionals in ways which lead to children’s abilities being ignored (Bakhtin, 1981; 1993). Woodhead (2009) submits it is misleading to suggest child development is a single paradigm, given the diverse, often competing, theories and perspectives that characterise this field (Woodhead, 2009). This is in line with Burman (2008) who argues the need to deconstruct developmental psychology, synthesise ideas, but avoid indiscriminate application of general moulds.

For example, practitioners and policy-makers are encouraged to take note of the culturally diverse society in which we live and question the dominance of any one view of the world. Practitioners and policy-makers are invited to: ‘...take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world’ (Burr, 2003:3). Burr argues that such a position would enable practitioners and policy-makers to generate radically different accounts of the social world and children’s experiences. It is suggested that for change to occur there is a need for a strong research agenda on children’s perspectives of change and transition, specifically in relation to children’s growth, learning and well-being, and that the notion of ‘expected’ behaviours should be questioned (Woodhead, 2009). This literature encourages the research to investigate the views of children on transition and the power relations of transition.

Some writers have specifically questioned the idea that expected behaviours take place in a stage-like sequence because of the negative implications for children

(MacNaughton, 2005). For example, some children can be judged as achieving or not achieving – and therefore as being ‘behind’ or ‘backward’ because of innate developmental delays – while others may be regarded as ‘gifted’ or ‘precocious’ because they achieve more than is expected (James, et. al., 2008:7).

Such views deflect attention from the *differences* between children. So some scholars eschew a strict developmental approach and prefer instead to raise awareness of the diversity of children (James, 2008). This awareness acknowledges the social, cultural and historical context of childhood and the highly variable circumstances in which children grow up (Prout, 2005; Dolan, 2012). In agreement with James (2008), Agar adds ‘it is not easy to lay clean lines over the complicated world of human understanding’ (Agar, 2008:30).

This encourages us to recognise that contemporary psychologists have moved beyond simplistic ideas of child development (Burman, 2008; Woodhead, 2009). As one social psychologist wrote:

As different historical and cultural groupings are studied, it may well be the case that current theories of child development will be forced to undergo revision (Denzin, 1977:2).

Since this time a number of psychologists have developed creative and complex ideas of childhood (e.g. Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989; Burr, 2003; Berk, 2007; Burman, 2008). Their work suggests that processes of transition that wish to be based on children’s views also need to recognise that children are not a homogenous group and therefore will have a range of views. As James asks ‘...if you want to know what children think about things and about their experiences as children, why not ask children’ (James, 2004: 7). This thesis sought to follow James (2004) by listening to children’s views (going beyond the voice, Bakhtin, 1993), but it also sought to go further by questioning entrenched professional positions where adults do not always listen to other stakeholders (Davis & Smith, 2012).

This raised questions from my study on whether processes of transition were flexible enough to accommodate diverse childhoods and suggested that there was a need to explore not only how concepts of child development influenced the processes of transition, but also to examine if academic tensions concerning concepts of child

development had any meaning in everyday settings. Hence, this study examined what concepts underpinned different participants' views on transition (children, parents and professionals) and whether their perspectives had any relationship to academic discourses.

## **2.2 Transition involves universal structures around the child (cultural, ecological and material)**

The term 'ecology' was initially applied by Ernst Haeckel in 1868 to refer to interdependencies among organisms in the natural world (Ungar, 2002). A more detailed description was provided by the progressive ecological theorist Naess (1989), who interpreted ecology as an:

Interdisciplinary scientific study of the living conditions of organisms in interaction with each other and with the surroundings, both organic as well as inorganic (Naess, 1989:36).

Considering both Haeckel (1868) and Naess's (1989) interpretations, *ecology* can easily be traced to biological theories that explain the adaptation of organisms to their environments. For example, when the child enters each new situation, such as a school, he or she adapts their requirements and changes the situation by their presence. The child is perpetually creating, restructuring and adapting to the environment. It is argued that because of this there is an easy fit between the science of ecology and young children's transitions (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002).

In the late 1970s, the Russian-American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (known as the father of transitions) introduced the Ecological Systems theory as an explanation of the process. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory attracted considerable interest, when he shared his view that in order to understand human development one must consider the whole ecological system in which growth occurs. Ungar (2002) claimed Bronfenbrenner (1979) '...pushed the ecological perspective to a respectable position in psychology' (Ungar, 2002: 485; also Tudge et al., 2011).

Writing for his colleagues in developmental psychology, Bronfenbrenner (1979) provided a simple yet comprehensive description of the settings and relationships which make up the ecological environment:

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate setting in which the person lives as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:21).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasised that the ecological systems theory situated the child at the centre of multiple spheres, similar to that of a Russian doll (*Figure 2*). This theory is also known as a child-centred approach to transition as the child is depicted in the centre of the spheres, also known as interactional processes between family members (Smith et al., 2011). Bronfenbrenner suggested that transition occurred when the child's position in the environment 'is altered as a result of a change in role, setting or both' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:26). Children within this model are viewed as situated in a social world that is interconnected.

The salient features of this theory represent a sociocultural view of development that does not solely focus on children's development, but also includes direct interaction with social agents, broad-based inputs of culture and socio-linguistic influences (Bamber, 1998; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Adeyemo, 2010). The wider social structural context is defined as the microsystem of the child's family, home community and school; the mesosystem, which connects two microsystems in interaction; the exosystem, external environments which directly influence the child, for example, a parent's workplace that affects family life; the macrosystem, cultural influences on the child such as attitudes and ideologies of home culture and the chronosystem, the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the child's life, for example, divorce. (Hetherington, Bridges & Insabella, 1998).



Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

*Figure 2* illustrates that the child is central to a variety of social influences, which may lead to a particular cultural identity. It pictures the child as an agent of his/her own and the world's construction, but whose agency develops in the context of an unchanging social and historical praxis, which includes both the (rigidly compartmentalised) 'constraints and potentialities of nature, and the action of other agents' (Aubrey et al., 2006:202–203). Implied in this model of ecology is the naïve notion that all family members benefit similarly from a system that establishes a balance in ways responsive to power (Ungar, 2002).

Despite these shortcomings, Bronfenbrenner's work with children and parents instigated intervention programmes such as High Scope and shaped and directed a proliferation of policies (named below). His nature and understanding of transition has permeated through many subsequent research studies with parents (Walkerdine, 1984; Rose, 1985; Laureau, 1987; Woodhead, 2003; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007).

Building on Bronfenbrenner (1979), researchers claim that, for the most part, the involvement of parents in their child's school experiences enhances their child's intelligence (Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Hoover-Dempsey and Sadler, 2005; Woodhead, 2006). This emphasis on the importance of parents underpinned educational policy development in Scotland such as the *Schools Parental Involvement Act* (2006). The main intention of this act was to motivate parents to take an interest in their child's education. This idea can also be found in the *Early Years Framework* (EYF) (2008), which aims to ensure that parents 'receive the

support and advice they need to be the best parents they can be for their children' (Scottish Government, 2011:4).

More recently, the *Early Years Collaborative* (2014) also places high importance on parental engagement. This raises questions about the extent to which current policy and practice on transition is influenced by ecological thinking and the degree to which children, parents and professionals recognise the limitations of this approach.

Transition scholars have drawn upon Bronfenbrenner's ideas as a source of inspiration (e.g. Pianta, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2010; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Rogoff, 2003; Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). Transition theory, which includes peers, family, schools and the community, is testimony to Bronfenbrenner's work (Hannah, Gorton and Jindal-Snape, 2010).

### **2.2.1 Critique of the ecological model**

Approaches which focus on the structural issues of transition have been contrasted with writing that highlights the importance of children's individual attributes, and argues that children's experiences depend on their coping strategies and how they individually react to the putative (assumed) characteristics of settings (Chambon & Irving, 1994; Griebel & Niesal, 2003). Such work suggests that there is a need to investigate the child's interpretation of transition. Notably, the child's voice is missing from Bronfenbrenner's theory as his work tends to characterise children as passive objects of adult ideas and practices. This is synonymous with mechanistic systems models, where little attention is paid to social determinants of the phenomena of ecology (Tudge et al., 2009).

Similarly, while it is true that Bronfenbrenner can be credited with inspiring discussions on peer relations, this appears limited to particular groups of children who experience 'good ecology' based on a proposed set of Western values (Bookchin 1980; Ungar, 2002; Tudge et al., 2009). Bronfenbrenner's work is generally inattentive to the processes and pathways available for children at psychological risk, whose circumstances raise questions about 'a good ecology' (Werner & Smith, 1982).



In relation to transition, Bronfenbrenner reported that if the child started school with a friend they were rated as being more socially adaptable and had greater academic competence (Brooker, 2008). They also demonstrated less behavioural issues (Ladd, 1990), and less ‘bewilderment’ (Cleave et al., 1982; Barrett, 1986). However, other writers have questioned this view and argue that during transition, children construct their own understandings mediated by relations with others (Mead, 1955; Rogoff, 2003; Woodhead, 2005). Children’s experiences are dependent on many things, such as the view that the teacher holds of the child and the fallibility of human judgement (Pianta, Cox, Taylor and Early, 1999) – as well as how, or if, the teacher can promote a positive approach to learning (Pollard & Filler, 1999; Serdal, 2010; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). The point is that children do not operate independently, but engage interdependently (Cocks, 2011).

Would we develop a very different understanding of ecological theory by interrogating the discourses on how children engage transition in their social worlds? Important research from Bruner and Haste (1987) and Trevarthen (1992) suggests that children try to please those around them in order to become part of a social group, indicating children are innately prepared to make sense of the context in which they are growing (also Peters, 2010a). It is also argued the child can, and does, produce entirely valid understandings of the meanings made by all those others with whom they interact (Snape & Spencer, 2003; Bakhtin, 1993; White, 2016). Similar ideas can be found in Rogoff’s (1991) ethnographic studies with the Mayan people in modern Mexico:

...transitions are commonly portrayed by researchers as belonging to individuals... However, transitions across childhood can also be considered cultural, community events that occur as individuals change their roles in their communities structure (Rogoff, 2003:150).

While Rogoff (2003) and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ideas are conceptually similar, Rogoff (2003), in an attempt to resolve Bronfenbrenner’s shortcomings, evolved and built upon his somewhat rigid position to suggest that transition is complex, fluid and embedded within a web of relationships. Rogoff (2003) disagreed with the view (suggested by Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003) that the child is solely at the centre and advanced the idea that the child is integral to different sites within the community.

She argued that the child moves in-between and around people and places, crossing boundaries and developing complex identities (also, MacNaughton 2002, Penman, 2006). This argument raised questions about how and where we research childhood transition and whether we can learn something from comparing different sites of transition.

Thinking about the community, rather than the individual, Rogoff (2003) promoted the idea that, rather than the child fitting into systems, the child and the community were mutually involved. She suggested that the child moved between systems and structures in communities and that children adapted to the 'role' of the school child. Rogoff (2003) suggested that transition was consequential, relational and interactional. For my study, this raised questions about how flexible professional approaches to transition are. Are they tied to sequential notions of learning or spontaneous? Do children encounter flexibility across different sites of transition? In particular, it encouraged me to investigate children's experiences of pre and post transition locations.

Corsaro and Molinari (2005) share Rogoff's (2003) view that relationships are critical to the transition process (also Dockett & Perry, 1999; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry et al., 2000; Peters, 2010a; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Griebel & Niesel, 2013). In a similar way to Rogoff, Corsaro and Molinari (2005) were concerned with the extent in which the child is embedded in personal relationships and the cultural context in which they live (Peters, 2010a).

Such writers argue that there are likely to be many different cultures within any social space. This more fluid view, where transition is changeable, active and fluctuating, and where the transition experience varies with each child, is promoted by writers in anthropology and can be contrasted with the rigidity of ecological theory (Oakley, 1994; Corsaro & Molinari, 2005, Davis et al., 2014). This fluid view encouraged this thesis not to consider place as sharing the same boundaries with culture and identity, and also to consider what contemporary approaches to transition might look like if they did not approach childhood as a homogeneous entity rigidly fixed into ecological structures.

Corsaro and Molinari (2005) express similar sentiments to Rogoff (2003), as both authors analyse the relationships between education and socialisation and the

historical and cultural surroundings that influence young lives. Such work hints at the complexity of community relationships and argues that the ‘solidarity’ of the community, such as trust, strong bonds, commitment, continuity and dialogue supports children to negotiate change from one stage of childhood to another, over time and from generation to generation (Kantor et al., 1998; Corsaro & Molinari, 2005).

Research based on this perspective emphasises the dynamic nature of childhood. Corsaro and Molinari's work in Modena, Italy, indicated that children were visible and they had pride and participatory power. Their sense of belonging was promoted and they were not closed away in homes or children's play spaces. They were viewed as integral to the full life of the city and exuberantly included in civic life.

For these writers, children are active actors of their own socialisation and are dynamic in assessing, altering and contributing to the societal circumstances they find themselves in (Corsaro & Molinari 2005, Cocks, 2011). This more fluid way of viewing children contrasts with the rigid ‘structures’ of ecology theory. It also raised questions about whether the different locations of my study would have flexible approaches to transition and whether child, parental or professional discourses would show awareness of these differences.

These contemporary perspectives of childhood suggest that children take information from their own unique childhood culture and their lived lives. This raised questions, for my thesis, concerning how and if young children negotiated the power relations of the specific communities into which they transitioned.

It has been suggested that the ecological model as the dominant approach tends to work *on* children rather than *with* children (Tudge et al, 2009). Similarly, it has been argued that there is a tendency for some professionals who take an ecological approach to assume that they know what the structural solutions to children's problems are and to fail to include them and their parents in the process of decision-making (Davis, 2011). Such writing challenges Bronfenbrenner's neat structures for overlooking the complex way children move between spheres:

Within contemporary industrial societies, there is too much diversity in existing family structures to warrant exclusive promotion of the traditional family (Archard & Macleod, 2002:13).

This suggests that diverse ecological forces outside the family influence the child's development as much as, or more than, the child's interaction with parents. In *The Nurture Assumption*, Judith Rich (1998) argues that diverse ecological forces outside the family may not always be taken into consideration.

It is also suggested that such theories overlook 'the means by which subjectivity is formed and by which we learn to govern ourselves' (Moss, 2006:181). This idea invites us to recognise the possibilities for multiple childhood identities and consider the children, parent and professional's own diverse constructions of the concept of transition (MacNaughton, 2002; Penman, 2006).

It has been argued that it is difficult theoretically, practically and politically to shift from hierarchical approaches that assume the professional knows best (Roaf, 2002; Rushmer & Pallis, 2002; Levitas, 2005) to a non-hierarchical society (Davis, 2011), where service users are assumed to be the experts on their own lives and professionals are believed to be the experts at bringing about processes of resolution (Pinkerton, 2006). Authors anchored in the philosophy of participatory methods, for example, Tisdall, Davis, & Gallagher (2009), have argued for professionals to think again about practice in ways that include the child's voice as '...children's views can inform social change' (Uprichard, 2010:10) and enable the child *and their family* to take part in decision-making (Easen et al., 2000, Davis, 2011; Frost & Dolan, 2012). Current trends continue to point to issues of hierarchy and power, where professionals dominate children's lives (Davis, 2011).

Bronfenbrenner can be credited for inspiring discussions about the variables that affect the child. At the same time, his own work is generally inattentive to the voices of the child and parents. However, Bronfenbrenner's writing embodies a theory that is plausible and attractive to others. This raised questions about how critical practitioners are of traditions in their field, and how aware they are of contemporary debates which emphasise the need for them to be reflexive.

By understanding the diverse perspectives of its research participants, it may be possible or necessary to take a radical departure from traditional ecological understandings and practices concerning transition.

### **2.3 Transition involves a sense of loss of human and spatial connections (locational, relational and emotional)**

Transition from home to school, or from an early years setting to the school, is often regarded as discontinuous in areas such as curriculum, pedagogy, resources and support (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Podmore, Sauvao & Mapa, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2007). For many years, researchers have sought a 'smooth transition' for children. However, contemporary writers have begun to realise that change may always involve turbulence as children experience a sense of loss of human and spatial connections (Newman & Blackburn, 2002, Dockett, 2011; Hartley et al., 2012).

Mounting opinion suggests that transition is likely to be unsettled as children experience many changes (Crinc & Lamberty, 1994; Dockett & Perry, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2007; Cassidy, 2005; Coughlan, 2008 and others). Other authors have noted that children may experience a sense of loss and distress caused by temporal and social discontinuity between the early years setting and primary school (e.g. Cleave et al., 1982; Curtis, 1986; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Podmore, Sauvao & Mapa, 2001; Fabian and Dunlop, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2007 and others).

According to Fabian (2002), children experience physical, social, and philosophical changes between the early years setting and school. These changes include 'vertical' and 'horizontal' transitions inside the school. These can include changes in location, such as moving rooms, or being placed at a different classroom table, or relational, as children experience changes with peers and teachers (Johansson, 2007). According to Peters (2010a), positive transitions are dependent on context. Peters argues that 'almost any child is at risk of making a poor or less successful transition if their individual characteristics are incompatible with the features of the environment they encounter' (Peters, 2010a:2).

The school building tends to be physically bigger than the early years environment. Children report concerns about being scared or lost and not knowing where to go (Moss & Petrie, 2002; Dockett, 2004; Simoncini, 2010); or worrying about where the toilets are situated (Lee & Goh, 2012). Relationally, children

undergo a shift in their social identity and in their social connections (McNaughton, 2002; Penman, 2006).

Children who have gone from an early years setting will experience a change of status from being the oldest, most 'expert' children, to being the youngest, most inexperienced ones (Einarsdottir, 2010). Some authors report that children look forward to playing with existing friends, while also feeling excited about meeting new people (Maclean, 1996; Loizou, 2011; Einarsdottir, 2010). However, children also report being concerned about the large number of people to meet and remember (Moska, 2010). For some, school may be the first place young children mix with older children (Fabian, 2000).

It is argued that 'the popularity of Vygotsky and now Rogoff, in particular, highlights the importance of learning and relationships in learning' (Tisdall & Punch, 2012: 259). It is suggested that building relationships between staff of both institutions is key to promoting continuity and a sense of belonging for the children (Hartley et al., 2012; Bennett, 2013; Moss, 2013).

Pedagogically, there is a significant difference in the approach to teaching and learning between the early years setting and school. This change may be the most disturbing one that children experience (Yeboah, 2002). Not surprisingly, children are likely to have complex feelings about this new way of learning. They may feel empowered by the intellectual challenges of the school institution, and proud that they are older (Loizou, 2011). At the same time, 'their school lives are more circumscribed' (Hillman, 2006:61). Children frequently report that they miss being able to choose what to do, and that their school is not democratic (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Einarsdottir, 2010, 2011, Huf, 2013). Children who do not fit the mould of structured learning may become disengaged from daily experiences (Bartholomew & Gustafsson, 1997; Huf, 2013), particularly those with educational needs (Janus et al., 2007; Dockett, Perry & Kearney 2011). Children often report a lack of authority over themselves (Lawrance, 2010).

Many authors who promote the concept of sense of loss have previously been teachers before becoming academics and their perspectives appear to be drawn from personal, as well as professional, experience (e.g. Fabian & Dunlop, 2002). According to Fabian and Dunlop, discontinuities can bring apprehension of the

unknown, which can cause anxiety, leaving an impression that may affect behaviours many years later (also Cleave & Brown, 1991; Dowling, 1998; Kienig, 1999, Cassidy, 2005).

Furthermore, Fabian and Dunlop (2002) put forward that transition is not only about the old and new settings but includes an overlap of at least three environments: the home world, the pre-school world and the school world. It is therefore suggested that studies of transition must look beyond single settings, to the relationships between the different settings of transition (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002). Such arguments impacted on my study and influenced why I gathered information from different sites, structural locations and participants.

When considering a sense of loss and spatial connections, thought must turn to children from backgrounds defined as disadvantaged. It is suggested that changes in familiar, and often trusted, aspects of their lives may result in a more problematic transition than their advantaged peers (Smart et al., 2006; Rosier & McDonald, 2011). Having open, transparent dialogue with the children about what they encountered was a valuable way of understanding their diverse perspectives concerning this topic (Dockett, 2011).

This study sought to build on approaches which acknowledge the child as a social actor who can shape, interpret and analyse their experience of transition (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000, 2005; Burke & Grosvenor, 2003; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Anderson & Cook, 2010 and others). My study also stemmed from the understanding that children should no longer be viewed as merely 'innocent and dependable creatures' (Prout, 2007:7). Prout (2007) has often argued that children are competent and able social actors. This concept can also be found in other childhood studies, for example, Qvortrup, 1987; 2005b; Prout & James, 1990; Waksler, 1991; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Prout, 2000; Alanen & Mayall, 2001; Corsaro, 2005; Prout, 2005; Handel, Cahill & Elkin, 2007.

A review of this literature does not seek to provide an account of every detail of Childhood Studies. However, it is important to note that the paradigm of childhood studies encourages us to view young children as active learners capable of co-constructing their own view of the world with caring, familiar others. As a practitioner from an Early Years and Childhood Studies background, with existing

relationships with young children, I sought to utilise these as a resource for encouraging young children to participate in the study. I have previously gone through the transition process with various cohorts of children and I have developed some scepticism concerning the emphasis placed on children's sense of loss and spatial connections within the literature.

### **2.3.1 Critique of a sense of loss of human and spatial connections**

Transition does not always bring negative experiences for children. Some authors argue that it is exaggerated and unfounded to claim that children express loss and experience anxiety (Lucey & Reay, 2000). On the contrary, transition may bring a sense of excitement, new beginnings, new relationships, and the opportunity to learn new things (Brostrom, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry et al., 2000; Peters, 2010a; Jindal-Snape, 2010; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Griebel & Niesel, 2013).

In contrast to the findings from Smart et al., (2006) and Rosier & McDonald, (2011), Dockett and Perry (2014a) argue that the school must have high expectations of all children. These high expectations, combined with an acknowledgment of the strengths and knowledge the children bring with them to school, are the foundations of effective approaches to transition, regardless of the background of those involved.

In summary a review of the literature leads to the following conclusions:

- **Transition has been a well-researched topic. The research illustrated the complexities of young children's transitions (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry et al., 2000; Peters, 2010a; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Griebel & Niesel, 2013). However, the literature showed there was room for improvement in transition processes. With regards to the complexities of transition discussed, e.g. children expected to fit into organisational systems and practices; and children being judged at school entry, the questions emerging from the literature were: *How do***



*children navigate the complexities of the transition process? What happens when children arrive at school?*

- **Generally, the literature illustrated that transition is done to children rather than with children, and that transition processes are adult-centric (Tudge et al, 2009). Therefore, the literature invites the question: *What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition and change?***
- **Tisdall et al., (2009) argue that policy and practice in early years settings should be informed by children in those settings, as children are experts in their own lives (also Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, (2005); Alexander et al., (2006); Tisdall, Davis & Prout, (2006); Kellett, (2010); Alderson & Morrow, (2011); Dolan, (2012). Childhood Studies researchers who adopt more listening approaches, may enable policy makers and implementers of policy to become more respectful and responsive to children's transition discourses and subsequent social realities. Therefore, the question that emerged was: *Do children and their family members make connections between, theory, policy and practice?***
- **Having open, transparent dialogue with children about what they encountered was a valuable way of understanding children's diverse perspectives concerning transition (Dockett, 2011). Therefore, professional/child dialogue is an important tool in education (Bakhtin, 1993).**
- **Based on deeper understandings as a result of the reviewed literature in this chapter, it is argued that further research will add to understandings of: *Are professional approaches to transition flexible? and How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?***

The following chapter discusses the ways in which the methodology and research were designed.

### Chapter Three: Introduction to methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology of the thesis – best defined as the chapter of theory in practice. Before progressing with the navigation of this chapter it is important to remind the reader that this study followed 16 children, (aged between four years six months, and five years six months) from one early years centre (*Lilybank*) to four primary schools (*Northfield, Southfield, Westfield and Eastfield*) in one Scottish city. The study group was, unintentionally, made up of eight boys and eight girls. There were 24 practitioners in *Lilybank*, who all indicated their willingness to be involved in the research. In the four primary schools four primary one teachers contributed to the research and, tangentially, four head teachers. Important to stress from the outset that I was the Head of Centre at *Lilybank*; such a ‘propitious’ position may have influenced the research. In other words self-referentially, I cannot, therefore, preclude the notion that power may have played a significant role, e.g., in the willingness of participants. Throughout this work I have stressed a commitment to reflexivity; this commitment I have discussed in more depth in this chapter. For example, I write of the importance of reflexive deliberation and how I was conscious of myself, and how I was able to distinguish me from myself (Archer, 2010); and also I have written of the resurgent challenges of being an insider researcher.

This chapter begins by describing my ontological, epistemological and methodological starting points here I have discussed reflexivity and being an insider-researcher, before providing a brief review of qualitative research methodologies.

Conventionally, researchers have been pressured to present evidence for their findings to prove these are ‘true’ or convincing statements (Schwandt, 2007) or ‘unequivocal imprints of reality’ (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). What I have argued here is that qualitative research methodologies admit that knowledge is always subjective and that, therefore, there cannot be one single truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lather, 2006). What is argued instead is that the defining quality can be considered by the rigour of the explanation, by the process of gathering data and by the way the findings are established.

I then explain why I have chosen an ethnographical approach to capture the complex nature of the early and primary school settings (Wells, 2009). Here I have stressed the importance of listening carefully and critically to children, with an image of the child as a capable and confident individual. Important limitations are noted – scholarly analysis of ethnographical field notes can only proceed from the writer's own context. Despite participants being involved in the analysis an element of personal interpretation and bias will always exist. For example, no matter how consciously I tried, I was aware that I was always reasoning from my own position (Bakhtin, 1990).

Further, as indicated, I explain how my actual interpretations of the research world were, at times, in conflict with my role as Head of Centre – as someone who had previous knowledge of the children and their families. There was no doubt that my previous knowledge shaped my thinking. As explained, as well as a separate initial section, I have also interwoven a discussion of how the principle of reflexivity runs throughout this thesis. Consequently, I gained a deeper understanding of myself. I have explained how I was very conscious of the extent to which I influenced the study outcomes and that being reflexive did not only impact on my work in the field, but also how I wrote up my field notes.

A section on the data collection process follows. I asked the research questions:

1. *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?*
2. *Are professional approaches to transition flexible or rigid?*
3. *How do children navigate the complexity of transition?*
4. *How fluid are the power relations in transition?*
5. *What happens when children arrive at school?*
6. *What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition and change?*
7. *How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?*

It is hoped that the reader is convinced that by spending two years in the early and primary settings, combined with termly visits to the children's homes, these

questions were answered through participant observation, informal interviews and (when appropriate) structured tools.

Following the methods section is information on how the participants and settings were identified. I then proceed with the ethical approaches relevant to research with children. Proper consent procedures were approved in line with the University of Edinburgh ethics committee – however, I have acknowledged that the researcher cannot rely on the legislative process alone it is up to the researcher to work out their own ethical practice in their own lived experiences.

Whilst remaining attentive to children as active participants in the research process, I have acknowledged the difficulty of power dynamics and highlighted the challenges of including children (Clark, 2005; Pascal & Bertram, 2009). Here I have argued that traditionally children have been viewed as subordinates by adults in research processes. Adults such as parents, professionals and others in academic disciplines view children as needing protection from harm, which can hinder active participation. I have explained my reasons for being at the research sites, recording what I was seeing and asking questions; and by continually exchanging dialogue with children both verbally and gesturally, I was ensuring that they wanted to contribute to the research. This way of being, I have argued, polemically, was more respectful of the child as an active co-contributor of knowledge (Robson, 2011). The thrust of the concluding section explores power, which is the intellectual thread of the analysis, this I have titled: ‘The rise of power in transition to school’ this section signals my discovery of Foucault and Bakhtin and how their ideas, methodologically, have supported the analysis of this thesis. Any methodology can cause the researcher to achieve stunning insights into some components of the children being studied, but it can inevitably mask others. I discovered that whilst Foucault unearthed certain insights I was left with gaps, which Bakhtin helped me fill and supplant with new ways of thinking. Although their roots and basic tenets are different e.g., neither Bakhtin nor Foucault wrote for transition and whilst Foucault did write about education, and Bakhtin’s writing on education was at best uncertain and at worst arbitrary (Brandist et al, 2016). Furthermore while Foucault did write on power, Bakhtin was limited in responding to issues surrounding power in a Foucauldian sense, however Foucault’s subsequent recognition of subjectivity puts

agency at its centre and this was Bakhtin's orientation; however, I have conveniently chosen to use the philosophers to help me understand resistance, as Foucault unearthed resistance then offered no solution, whereas Bakhtin did offer a solution – through his notion of *heteroglossia*. These overarching characteristics are important in order to see how two very different philosophers work can be reconciled. For that main reason, methodologically, I have found Foucault and Bakhtin were generally found to be helpful - at least - in part with the researchers own premises and subsequent analysis of the data. Having anchored my overall principles, I now proceed by indicating more specifically my ontological, epistemological and methodological starting points.

### **3.1 Positioning oneself: My ontological, epistemological and methodological starting points**

...ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions; these in turn, give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:5).

My intention was to approach my research with a consciousness and experience-oriented interpretative view of ontology and epistemology (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). For example, one of the central themes of this study was to gather various perspectives on transition (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Alexander et al., 2006; Tisdall, Davis & Prout, 2006; Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009; Kellett, 2010; Alderson & Morrow, 2011) and was carried out on the ontological belief that children, parents and professionals are social actors who have diverse and varied thoughts on transition. The epistemological position of this thesis is that by carrying out fieldwork I believed I would gain insight into the socially-constructed nature of participants' reality.

My methodological framework was centred on the belief that, in order to gain insight into participants' views and answer my key questions, I would need to reduce the 'objecting separateness' between the research area and myself (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Fundamentally, my research questions required dialogue with children, parents and professionals concerning the meanings of transition (Crotty, 1998; Greene & Hogan, 2005). My research framework sought to close the distance

between the research participants and myself in order to gain complex and detailed understandings of transition. By making deliberate attempts to understand, I became open to embodied ways of knowing.

### 3.1.1 Reflexivity

According to Michael Lynch, 'Reflexivity is a well-established theoretical and methodological concept in the human sciences' (Lynch, 2000:26). Lynch goes on to explain, that researchers can use reflexivity as a source of 'individual enlightenment' (Lynch, 2000:26). In the hope that I too would be 'enlightened' a central criterion of the methodology for this study was that of reflexivity. Reflexivity is defined by Callaway (1992) as the researcher adopting a 'radical consciousness' and along similar lines Archer (2010) goes on to argue that reflexivity finds its home in the 'internal conversation'. I found both those definitions helpful. With a sense of self-conscious recognition, but also with a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty, reflexivity was used as a way of opening up to knowledge by identifying the complex processes of knowledge production which furnished the opportunities for understanding, as opposed to establishing 'truths'. Consequently, reflexivity enabled me to challenge the unequivocal imprints of reality, as I explored, in a sceptical manner, the objective reality, i.e., social *facts*, and the intersubjective experiential worlds, i.e., meanings, subsequently enabled me to avoid a one-sidedness to the research. This approach assisted a kind of ambiguity with regards to interpretative potentialities.

However, that said, the process of reflexive analysis was difficult, due to its subjectivity. As indicated, I had to continually question what I was seeing and consequently, understanding. By way of illustrating, I was initially challenged by what was said to some children by their teachers, for example, one day it was raining, which generally meant that the children would not be allowed out to play at snack time, however one child ran to his coat and picked it up and said to the children 'Don't worry...if you have your coat you can go out.' He offered smiling to the rest of the class. 'Put that down and sit down!' the teacher shouted. Here was a child offering a solution to a problem, and his elucidation was rejected. Instead of

proceeding to my own conclusion I continually had to remind myself, this was not *Lilybank* things were done differently in school. I quickly realised my previous experiences at *Lilybank* must not be confounded with my findings in the primary schools (DeLyser, 2001). In *Negotiating the Swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice*, Linda Finlay warns '[t]he process of engaging in reflexivity is full of muddy ambiguity' (Finlay, 2002:209).

In agreement with Finlay, I too found reflexivity 'full of muddy ambiguity', but I also found it to be integral to the methodological approach I adopted. I have not elaborated in any great detail here as reflexivity is permeated throughout this work, but it was worthy of highlighting reflexivity in this succinct section to draw the attention of the reader to this critical methodological concept.

I discovered, too, the dividing line between reflexivity and insider-research can become a little blurred both need the researcher to be thoughtful and self-aware. In the following section I have attempted to illustrate some of the advantages and disadvantages of insider research.

### **3.1.2 Insider – Research**

It is important to stress at the outset that an important distinguishing feature of this study was that I was an insider – researcher (Adler & Adler, 1994). Unleur (2012) stresses the critical importance of the researcher making this clear at the outset of the research; otherwise it could make for suspicious research which may be claimed by critics as illusory. Though I expose some of the limitations of being an insider, I also build on the fundamental advantages this opportunity provides.

During the data collection process I was the 'Head' of *Lilybank*, indeed the founder of the setting and probably a respected member of that community. Critically, I had to consider as 'Head' I could be perceived by the study population as having power and authority over them (Smyth & Holian, 2008).

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) highlight certain advantages to being an insider – researcher, e.g., the researcher is likely to have a greater knowledge of the culture being studied and it is likely that the researcher will not, unnaturally, upset the flow

of social interaction (e.g., the children did not seem upset by my presence in the classroom) and that ‘intimacy promotes telling’. One advantage I found was being in a position that allowed me to return to the children and adults for clarification after the data was collected. And that spontaneous responses from children and adults enriched the data as children and adults returned to me with other reflections they had had on an earlier questions. This was very advantageous to the process. Further, I considered that the insider can have a privileged knowledge that takes an ‘outsider’ a long time to gather (Smyth & Holian, 2008).

On the other hand, this familiarity can also come at a price, as the researcher may lose objectivity, to overcome this disadvantage I intended to go into the spaces ‘making the familiar strange’ (Malinowski, 1961). However, there was always the danger that I discounted routine practices because they were familiar to me. I was also very conscious that I knew the settings I was studying, and it was of critical importance that I respected the ethical issues related to anonymity of those settings (Unleur, 2012).

Furthermore, as an insider-researcher, I had to consider that it was very likely that my presence influenced the study, for example children and parents known to me over many years may have wanted to please me. Fundamentally, therefore I could not dismiss that children and parents responses could be steered by their previous knowledge of me.

Additionally, *Lilybank* was not a neutral, apolitical, ideology-free space there was no question that I was carrying knowledge from *Lilybank* into the four schools. I had to be conscious that my knowledge / experience from *Lilybank*, could have influenced certain interpretation possibilities.

To conquer the disadvantages a high level of thoughtfulness was required. I overcame the disadvantages in the following ways, I became ‘the researcher’ and emphasised my role to the study population, (in fairness this was probably easier for the schools to accept rather than *Lilybank*). I did not divulge my data with anyone with the exception of my supervisors. I gathered the data without preconception as much as I could, and as indicated previously, I was both reflective and reflexive



throughout the process. Having the opportunity to continually check data with the children and adults helped me understand the data without prejudice. When designing this research I considered the ethical issues (discussed later in this section) necessary when planning an ethnographical exploratory study. I listened to the participants, recording exactly what they said, and I was careful not venture my opinion. Despite certain dilemmas I faced I did not disturb any situation during the research process.

Overall, I believe being an insider in this study was an advantage. That is, knowing the children prior to the transition helped me 'see' how they navigated it, however as indicated, being an insider also caused me to have quandaries about our schooling system – I had long since identified that those 'impasses' will not be forgotten and will be further explored in other studies after this process. I will now discuss my methodological approach.

### **3.1.3 Methodological approach – qualitative/ethnographic inquiry**

In order to explore the ideological culture of what is meant by transition, this research was motivated by a broad definition of ethnography using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This meant that I could study the children and their parents in their familiar surroundings, which helped me make sense of, and interpret, the meanings the children and their parents brought to those surroundings. On two occasions, however, I was asked to conduct interviews at a more convenient location.

Qualitative research values the perspectives of those taking part, in the decision-making process and in active participation (Christensen & James, 2000; Alderson, 2000; Mayall, 2002; Bryman, 2004; Alderson & Morrow, 2004). Within this context, knowledge is co-created and manifested with the children, their parents and myself. My role was to make sense of the different voices I encountered and to represent them in the final text in ways that were meaningful to the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This was a deeply interpretative process, where the notion of a single truth was challenged as I captured a snapshot of the children's ever-changing lives.

The main aim was to avoid rendering children as finalised objects. I was aware that as a privileged researcher I was seeing and hearing unique moments in children's lives (Bakhtin, 1993; White, 2016). On this point a caution comes from Canella and Lincoln (2007):

Hearing the voices of others can become another colonising apparatus as the Western ear is constructed as having the power to listen and the intellect to create harmonious pluralisms. This colonising apparatus thus denies the ways that distinctions are manufactured through the imposition of disequity ultimately...and ultimately reinforces the voice of those in power (Canella & Lincoln, 2007:320).

What Canella and Lincoln (2007) suggest is that the subjectivity of the qualitative researcher must be frequently considered, and what is being seen and heard must be constantly questioned. Therefore, I had to ceaselessly question what I was seeing and hearing (Youdell, 2005). This careful attention led to new insights, for example, *power* being a critical concept to consider when discussing transitions.

In qualitative inquiry the researcher is both storyteller and scientist and also the key instrument in collecting an array of data. I quickly learned that fieldwork is dependent on the researchers' perception of the field at any given point. I was aware that by simply being 'there' in the playroom or classroom, and/or children's homes, I was actively creating realities and meanings (Cook & Hess, 2007; Robson, 2011).

There is no doubt that the children were affected by my presence in the classrooms. They would occasionally glance over and sometimes smile. At other times they just looked up from what they were doing. On one occasion I overheard a child saying to a fellow pupil: "She is 'Miss McNair to you, but she is Lynn to me.'" This created different kinds of social realities for the children and also provided a glimpse of what was important to the children I was studying.

Also, when I went into family homes, the children and parents were prepared to meet 'visitors', often with plates of biscuits. I was aware that I was shaping observed moments and constructing meaning –therefore I had to be reflexively aware of my preconceptions. As Cook and Hess (2007) contend:

Thinking about the adult-orientated conceptualisation...and the overlay of adult expectations, has highlighted the need for us to consider how much more we have to learn about the strength and intrusiveness of our own perceptions when working with children. A vision may be sharper than an adult's, yet the adult may miss what is being demonstrated because it does not fit their vision of reality. The child's perspective, being a fragile notion, can then easily be crushed by adults who cannot move from their own version of an experience or, in the urgency of their research, find it difficult to see the alternative interpretation (Cook & Hess, 2007:44).

A number of field researchers have explored the many ways that human relationships can influence final findings (e.g. Emerson et al., 1995). Therefore, as indicated, I adopted an open, critical reflexive approach, (Cannella & Lincoln, 2007). This resulted in an ongoing conversation taking place that enabled me to question and construct my interpretations (Wegerif, 2006, 2008).

Callaway (1992) prompts us that being reflexive is not purely a feature of analysis, but it is also a form of political awareness in which the researcher fosters a radical consciousness of self 'in facing the political dimensions of fieldwork' (Callaway, 1992: 33). It was important for me to remind myself that I was in the role of researcher and not as an educator.

Furthermore, Wells (2009) reminds us that classrooms are complex communities and that researchers who observe infrequently will only glean a partial story. This research was designed to benefit the participants and to learn about their lived experiences of transition.

For that reason, I spent one year in the playroom at *Lilybank* hanging out with the children, and one year between the four primary schools. By doing so I became open to embodied ways of knowing.

### **3.1.2 Why ethnography?**

Ethnography is...the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one's own experience in the world of these others (Van Maanen, 1998: ix).

As indicated, I had a long-term relationship with the children who took part in this study – some of the children I had known for five years. All of them attended the early years setting which I had worked in for 13 years. In some cases, I had known many of the parents for longer, as elder siblings had also attended the centre. One could criticise the potential for bias becoming an issue. However, Mandell (1991) suggests that such relationships are crucial in unearthing hidden information and other writers argue that an ethnographic approach is a most effective methodology for this type of study (Jenks, 2001:71). James explains:

In its literal translation, the term ‘ethnography’ means writing about people and...that it is the use of ethnography as a research methodology which has enabled children to be recognised as people who can be studied in their own right within the social sciences. In this sense ethnographic methods have permitted children to become seen as research participants and, increasingly therefore, it is ethnography which is fast becoming the new orthodoxy of childhood research... (James, 2002:246).

Ethnography has become a flourishing tradition and a persuasive means of the ways to capture how children make sense of their worlds (James, 2002). By giving voices to the children, they were more able to contribute to a rigorous research process (Agar, 2008; Fetterman, 2010; MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

Key questions included inviting children to talk about personal experiences. Therefore, I decided that the study cohort would include a small number of children – 16 – because ethnographic research typically investigates a small number of cases (Hammersley, 1998). Having set out to understand transition across different settings, it was possible to connect the views of Harries (2012) to those of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Rogoff (2003) and Corsaro (2005) in arguing that ethnography provided a key opportunity to understand the perspectives of children and adults within a wider context, such as connecting the early years setting and school with the children’s homes.

By being present in the various contexts I was able to gather information for all my key questions. For example, being at the school days after the children had started I had the opportunity to ‘see’ and understand the questions *How do children*

*navigate the complexity of transition? What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition and change?* I am not convinced that any other methodology would have supported the gathering of such rich data.

### **3.1.3 Ethnography and listening to children**

An ethnographic approach raises issues about the relationship between adult researcher and child and the reasons why we do research with children. It is argued that no adult can hope to have acquired the richness of knowledge that is inherent to children, and adults need to do more exploration with them (Cook & Hess, 2007). It is also argued that our knowledge is advancing all the time and that children have taught us that listening and participative processes should not only inform research, but enable them to change their lives:

As we move into the second decade of the 21st century, it is apparent that children's agency and voice are going to preoccupy children's agendas in a way that listening and participating dominated the first decade...Establishing methods for hearing children's research voices...providing powerful dissemination platforms are central tenets of this process (Kellett, 2010:217).

A key question of this thesis was to explore whether children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice. This required a methodology which valued and collected the views of children and adults on their understanding of transition. The value of listening to children can be found in the work of Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, (2005); Alexander et al., (2006); Tisdall, Davis & Prout, (2006); Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, (2009); Kellett, (2010); Alderson & Morrow, (2011), who suggest that the key benefits include:

- **Children are experts in their own lives and as such are able to give reliable testimonies; giving valuable insights into children's feelings and thinking.**
- **Children are social actors and are actively involved in creating their own social selves; and children who are listened to take**

**more control over what they are doing and make choices of how they could do it (Nutbrown, 1996).**

- **Children have competencies which differ from adults and other children (and are not necessarily inferior to those of adults).**
- **Self-esteem is raised by listening and when established at a young age remains stable throughout life (Neaum & Tallack, 2002).**
- **By listening we may shift our attitude in how we work with children; the ethics of listening oblige practitioners to renounce power and create opportunities for dialogue in order to find joint solutions (Cairns, 2011).**

This study aimed to capture not only what children said, but the interplay between participants and, importantly, what happened before and after (Skukauskaite & Green, 2004). For example, the children voluntarily offered information. One day we were queuing up to leave the classroom. A small group of children at the back of the queue, who would not, generally, have spoken at the front where the teacher was leading the class, began informing me of their ages. “I’m five now (showing five fingers), but she’s still four”, said one girl, pointing to her partner. The reaction of the four-year-old child told me that this may not be the desired age to be. This type of voluntary information provided indications of what was important to the children at that time.

Tisdall et al, (2009) make the most significant point that having a space for children to speak is not enough for children to be heard. What counts is how these voices are being used. According to Bakhtin (1993), children’s voices should not be viewed as conclusive statements. Children may become disempowered if their voices are simply used to confirm ideas that adults have (Harwood, 2010).

James (2007) maintains that research goes past quoting words to critically reflect on how children’s voices are moulded by society, the state, and adult views of childhood: ‘Children as subjects are also structurally and culturally determined as social actors with specific roles to play, as children’ (James, 2007:270). It is argued that by listening holistically to the children, by providing metacognitive

opportunities for children to express themselves and encouraging them to discuss and reflect on their responses, respectful recordings and interpretations were made.

Moral responsibility for listening and responding to the children is interwoven into the following section.

### **3.1.4 Ethnography – different methods for children and adults**

It is suggested that a blend of methods is best to use when conducting research with children, partly to keep their interest and attention (Punch, 2002). However, there is a tendency in Childhood Studies for researchers to view the child as not having the skills to participate in research and needing to be helped with the appliance of methods which will overcome their lack of ability (e.g. Fine & Sandstrom, 1988, also for an overview, Alderson, (1995); Morrow & Richards (2004)). In contrast, Christensen and James (2001) argue that there is no need to consider different methods for children and adults, but it is the relevance of the questions and questioning style that is of importance. Christensen and James say:

To carry out research with children does not necessarily entail adopting different particular methods...like adults, children can and do participate in structured and unstructured interviews; they fill in questionnaires; and on their own terms, they allow the participant observer to join with them in their daily lives. Thus, although some research techniques might sometimes be thought more appropriate for children, with regard to particular research contexts or the framing of particular research questions, there is, we would argue, nothing to children that makes the use of any technique imperative (Christensen & James, 2001:2).

Ethnographic field research studies groups of people as they go about their everyday lives. In this case it was focusing on children but also parents, and professionals. Meanings emerge through *collective* talk and action (Emerson et al., 1995, also Bakhtin, 1993; White, 2016).

Therefore, it was important that I did not take one viewpoint as the complete version of events. There were multiple truths, each of which was revealed by a shift in perspective, method or purpose. Nietzsche, who shaped Foucault's mind (Belsey

& Peter, 2007), argued that knowledge is perspectival in nature; to gain knowledge requires multiple viewpoints to interpret a reality diverse in content and character. As Emerson et al. (1995) argued:

...‘what happened’ is one account, made by a particular person to a specific other at a particular time and place for particular purposes. In all these ways, [listening to all participants] builds sensitivity to the multiple, situational realities of those studied into the core of fieldwork practice (Emerson et al., 1995:12).

By listening to the voices of children, parents and professionals through participant observation, informal interviews and structured activities I was able to take into account the multi-perspectives of the many actors in a situation (Cook & Hess, 2007).

### **3.1.5 Why no other methodology?**

Ethnography is distinct from the ‘harder’ social sciences. As Agar puts it:

...ordinary social science begins with the variables already given by some theory, and then tries to figure out how to locate, decontextualise and measure those variables. A card-carrying holist notices a ‘variable’ in a situation, maybe one that he/she had never thought about before, but then he/she wonders what other things might be connected with it, in that situation and out of it (Agar, 2005:16).

According to Geertz (1973), ethnography is not ‘an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretative one in search of meaning’ (Geertz, 1973:5). Ethnographical research focuses social life through a naturalistic approach, in contrast to a positivistic approach, which ‘presupposes the social world should be studied in its natural state, undisturbed by the researcher’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983:6). My research questions were principally about the meanings of transition – therefore a positivist approach was not necessary.



### 3.1.6 My role as a qualitative/interpretative ethnographer

As a qualitative/interpretative ethnographic researcher, I saw meanings through a cultural lens (Creswell, 2007) and adopted a role somewhere between that of participant and observer. Harries (2012) claims the ethnographer is neither fully one nor the other. To him, the ethnographer is everywhere and nowhere and is in fact a 'spy' (Harries, 2012). I took on whatever role enabled me to fully engage with participants, such as an Early Years Practitioner (EYP) or Pupil Support Assistant (PSA). The aim was to utilise my aptitude (whether implicit or explicit) in understanding children.

The children's experiences of transition were varied and 'related to [the] temporal and spatial contexts' (Moss & Petrie, 2002:20, also Peters, 2010). This meant that throughout the process it was necessary to be both highly reflective and reflexive (James et al., 1998). I continually revisited what the children had said in an attempt to understand what they meant, rather than make any assumptions (Garbarino & Stott, 1992). Information collected during this role was substantiated by informal interviews and (when appropriate) structured tools.

Important to my role as a researcher, but also as a professional, I got a sense from the children that power inequalities between child and adult were not as hierarchical with me as with other adults in the classroom. This I gleaned from the children's ongoing discussions with me and when they chose to volunteer information. They were aware of why I was there, as I had told them when they asked, and so had their teachers.

The children would ask what I was writing in my field notes and some would nod and accept what I had written. At other times the children would ask me to write something down, for example, "Write down I wrote a story about what I did with my dad." At no other time did I hear a child instruct the teacher to do any task. Additionally, if the children wanted to show me something, such as a model, a drawing or a piece of writing, they would sometimes call me 'Lynn'. If the teacher was nearby they would call me 'Miss McNair'. The children were aware that I did not mind being addressed as 'Lynn', but the teacher may object. The children's ability to differentiate between 'Miss McNair' and 'Lynn' led me to conclude that

that they were aware our relationship was different to the one they had with their teacher. The contingent nature of adult child relations could act as a support or hinder the research process. Indeed one limitation of the research was that once the children became more embedded in the culture of the school the distance between us widened, for example one child eventually only referred to me as ‘Miss McNair.’

### **3.1.7 Merits and limitations of the specific research methods employed.**

‘Method’ is usually a ‘means’ towards an ‘end’ (a ‘way’). As such, method stands midway of an assumption/ hypothesis and an end (Sembou, 2011 no pagination).

This section explains the merits and limitations of the methods I chose. No single method could have identified the subtle variations of the children’s experiences. However, as a lead practitioner in the early years field, my work with children, parents and professionals had already provided insight into underlying assumptions concerning transition. I was therefore able to utilise my knowledge to support data collected through observation or interview methods. de Matta (1994) advocated research conducted by people of the same culture. However, as Agar (2008) cautioned, being an ‘insider’ was difficult and required continuous consideration of my conduct.

Going into schools and observing different pedagogical practices from that of the Early Years Centre was initially challenging (Watt, 2007). At first I found the endless shouting at children in one school difficult to cope with. On the first day in one school (*Westfield*), one of the study children was walking past me, dressed in his uniform – he looked at me and slipped his hand into his trouser pocket. Suddenly his teacher shouted: “Boys with their hands in their pockets don’t grow!”

When this happened, I initially found myself getting upset. The shouting prompted memories of my childhood – that is, a retrospective examination of my own childhood helped me to connect the experience of the classroom to my feelings of being upset (Elbow, 1995; Huff, 1999). I am one of 13 children and when my father shouted it usually meant one of us was in trouble. I have carried the fear of

shouting into my professional life. I realised that my personal experience and fear of shouting may have inhibited my 'seeing' (Russell & Kelly, 2002).

Maxwell (2005) contends that we must be aware of our concerns and how these shape the research. Forewarned as a researcher – while I felt torn and whether I agreed with the practice or not – it was critical that, in order to proceed with the research, I had to be aware that while an adult raising her voice upset me it may not have the same impact on others. An ongoing reflexive, open and critical approach that continuously analysed the pros and cons of my methods was required (Callaway, 1992; Scott–Jones & Watt, 2010).

I carried out participant observation in five educational settings, one early years setting and four primary schools. This enabled me to observe patterned culture – specific naturalistic behaviours while being present (Christensen & James, 2001). Being a participant observer supported my belief that children, parents, professionals had knowledge on transition (Mayall, 1994). I used notes and tape recordings to improve the accuracy and quality of my data. My field notes were useful in recording knowledge and communication expressed in other ways, for example children's body language (Warming, 2005).

However, there are flaws to participant observation. Data collected may not accurately represent what participants said or did. I often returned to participants to clarify meaning and ask if I had interpreted it accurately. I conducted 45 interviews, three interviews per family, apart from one family which could only commit to one and another family which could commit to two. Throughout, I used open-ended questions to allow for more creative responses (Mandell, 1991; Mahon et al., 1996; Mayall, 2001), taping the interviews and writing notes when I returned home.

The data provided an aide-memoire to my participant observations in educational settings and I had the opportunity to probe for further elaboration (Wellington, 2000). As transition is such a sensitive and emotional process for some, I would conclude that non-invasive and non-confrontational participant observation was the most appropriate method for collecting data (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Mauthner, 1997). I discovered that through the relaxed conversations which emerged, more insightful information was gathered, although I took into account a warning from Komulainen (2007):

‘The notion of listening to children’s voices’ may be a good point for social study of children’s lives. Nevertheless, it makes it...a challenging task...‘voice’ is understood as a multidimensional social construction, which is subject to change...an uncritical treatment of view/‘voice’ as an individual property dismisses the ambiguity and socialness of human communication...communication is a complex, context-bound phenomenon’ (Komulainen, 2007: 13–23).

I was, therefore, conscious of the contextualised and situated ‘voices’ of children. For instance, when children were with their friends, such as giving me a tour of their schools with others, they responded differently to when they were on their own or in their homes.

For this reason, I often consulted the children on whether they wanted to be in friendship groups or alone, at school with friends or not, or at home with parents, siblings or not. A key criticism of group discussions with children is that they are:

...less successful at generating data than more free-flowing, unplanned data generation techniques that mimicked more closely the young people’s everyday means of communication (Holland et al., 2011:367).

In agreement with Holland et al., (2011), I was aware from observing children in *Lilybank* that talking in small groups together was a familiar pastime and conversations flowed effortlessly. For this reason, I discovered that both participant observation and informal interviews in individual or small groups had merit.

Research suggests that gender and age are important considerations in group discussions (Mauthner, 1997). Single sex groups can be more successful than mixed ones as boys often talk more loudly, which determines the topics of conversation and tends to overshadow girls (Mauthner, 1997). This is discussed further in Chapter Five.

Some researchers promote the use of structured activities, such as reading, drawing, writing and photographs as data collection methods (Davis 1998). In early years settings these are viewed as everyday experiences for the children. Some of those experiences became part of the research, such as children’s drawings. However, I did not view these experiences as a separate method of ethnography –

they were very much part of children's lives and integral to an ethnographical approach. I found in a similar way to Davis (1998) that the utility of any tool was particular to specific children. Not all children chose to draw and this was not unexpected as Dockett et al., (2009) contend:

It should not be assumed that all children like to draw, or indeed feel comfortable drawing. Some children may not regard themselves as 'good drawers' and not engage fully in the task. Even if children like to draw and regard themselves as competent drawers, they may not feel comfortable with researchers invading their personal space (Dockett et al., 2009: 283).

I was keen that children and their families had varying options on how to put their ideas across. Some parents were keen that their child was in bed before I arrived, while other children were ready and waiting. I was more than willing to have children and parents influence the structure of the process. Taking into account what the children and parents wanted to do was a more ethical way to respond as a researcher, showing respect for their interests, rather than following my own agenda.

Another example of this was when children wanted to show me round their school. I had not originally thought of doing this – the idea came from the children (Einarsdottir, 2007; Assuncao Folque, 2010; Stephenson, 2011). This provided another opportunity for the children to share their experiences of the school (Ennew & Plateau Pierre, 2004).

Three of the head teachers agreed, but one did not as it was her belief that the children did not know the school well enough. I negotiated with the three willing head teachers to have an early start, before the teachers arrived. For this method I borrowed ideas from the mosaic approach, which brings together 'a range of methods for listening to children's lives' (Clark, 2005: 29), combining 'traditional methodology of observation and interviewing with the introduction of participatory tools' (Clark, 2005:31). As Clark (2005) warns that interviews alone tend to produce monosyllabic answers, I found this to be true at times, especially when asked the question 'How is school?' The response from most of the children was "good", as they looked at their parents.

The mosaic approach provided an opportunity to observe the children as they moved freely around the school, giving them ‘space and opportunity’ (Clark, 2005:31). I also provided each child with a disposable camera. The key aim was to enable the children to use images as a starting point for discussions at a later date. Photographs have a currency in an adult world, yet, ‘...not all children or adults are drawn to the visual mode of communication’ (Clark, 2010:118).

Whilst there is no doubt that the mosaic approach has enjoyed much success, some researchers have found it limited:

- **Photographs may not be that reliable as tangible evidence of interest (Cook & Hess, 2007:44).**
- **Sometimes photographs are not the children’s own representations, being influenced or controlled by adults or having not the manner which researchers had assumed, but in children’s own ways (Barker & Weller, 2003:218– 220).**
- **Children may actually resist taking pictures, or even dislike the activity and attempt to avoid participating (Guariento, 2010:106– 109).**

I discussed the purpose of taking photographs with the children and demonstrated how to use the camera (Clark & Moss, 2009). I discovered that whilst the children were interested in taking images at the outset, particularly of each other, it quickly became an inappropriate tool, preventing them from moving freely through the building. The central aim was to use methods that the children were comfortable with and after a while the children gave up their cameras and the tours flowed more freely, venturing into parts of the school they had never seen but were curious about.

### **3.1.8 Data recording and analysis**

According to Agar (2008), the ethnographer records practices in everyday life which are built on shared knowledge of the participants. In order to place a check on the negative influence of bias, writers recommend additional controls such as contextualisation, triangulation (Scrimshaw & Gleason, 1992; Flick, 2007) and non-

judgmental orientation (for example, that no value judgments are made about unfamiliar practices).

My method was not concerned with scientific rationality and control but with an aim to iron out difference and bias. My approach was wholly concerned with respondent bias/particularities that compared and contrasted the views of children, parents and professionals with my own perceptions and interpretations. By collecting multiple sources of data I was in a position to better understand the competing ideas that respondents held concerning transition. Multiple perspectives added rigour and provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

I also collected the multiple perspectives of respondents through overt participant observation and compared these to documents such as primary school booklets, memoranda, inspection reports, interim transition reports and national policy recommendations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2009). The aim was to collect textual and oral information that connected school and the children's homes. This approach enabled the thesis to explore and describe the systems the participants found themselves in. To manage the large collection of descriptive observations, I stored them under categories such as the name of the school and session when the observations took place. Child and parent interviews were recorded in folders with specific dates and times (Wellington, 2000). I did not want anything too 'fixed' as children and parents continually added to what had been observed or said, as Angrosino (2007) contends:

The technology available to the modern ethnographer enhances his or her ability to do fieldwork, but also runs the risk of 'fixing' the moment with such clarity and apparent finality that the flux of real life is no longer captured (Angrosino, 2007:96).

It is suggested (Geertz, 1973), that data collected from the immediacies of social life is often gathered in an unstructured form and made up of spoken discourse narratives that can be far from inert and transparent. Data from ethnographic research relies heavily on the personal integration of the researcher and participant's intuition (Agar, 2008). I began by chopping and sorting the data (Agar, 2008) into categories to systematically organise it. During this process I experimented with the software

NVivo, but found the traditional methods I was accustomed to more intuitive and rigorous. In other words, it was data analysis by scissors. I enjoyed the tangibility of this method.

I discovered the process of collecting and interpreting materials was broad and diffuse and did not fit neatly into categorisation (Agar, 2008). Some writers argue that classification involves identifying five to seven general themes and even then these need a process of ‘winnowing’ (Creswell, 2007:155). Others recommend:

...reading line-by-line through as many pages of field-notes as possible, at least until coding seems to generate no new ideas, themes, or issues (Emerson et al., 1995: 144).

The patterns and irregularities (descriptive analysis) were broken down and shared with the children and parents in an attempt to ascertain whether they made sense to them (Angrosino, 2007). Throughout I used a questioning approach, by asking: ‘*Was the data collected when the child was on their own or with others?*’ The analysis was carried out initially on an individual basis, where I paid close attention to the socio-cultural context in which the data was produced, such as public or private statements. The intention was not to make generalisations about what transition means for children. I therefore employed an emic (insider’s point of view) perspective with the children and their families.

I also returned to emerging themes, engaging in abductive analysis of emic and etic (outsider’s point of view) perspectives. I then reviewed all the data, organising it into themes that cut across all data sources.

### **3.1.9 Abductive analysis**

One of the main aims of this research was that new concepts would exist at the end because ethnographic research opens up opportunities for variations and possibilities (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). It has been argued that ethnography is neither deductive (Aristotelean) nor inductive (Baconian), but that ethnography is in fact abductive in developing new theoretical positions (Agar 2008). Agar (2008) claims there are theoretical difficulties with deductive and inductive research:



Deduction is about deriving hypotheses from theoretical positions; induction is about fitting found data to the propositions in a theoretical system (Agar, 2008:35).

Agar argues that both approaches are closed with reference to the original system of concepts, offering little opportunity for new insights, perspectives and approaches. From this he proposes abduction, which he claims is a ‘research logic that features the development of new theoretical propositions’ (Agar, 2008:35). In this study, not all the analysis took place after the project – an ethnographic approach enabled children and their families to shape the themes or abstractions that emerged (James, 2002).

### **3.2 The research participants**

Of fundamental importance to this research was exploring children’s views on their experience of transition from an early years setting to a primary setting, implying that the children had to be in the process of doing so. In Scotland, age is regarded as a significant way of determining the school child (Gorton, 2012). Therefore, all the children were identified as of school age, between 4.5 and 5.5 years old.

In April 2012, I recruited 16 children who would be going to school in August of that year. All the children used language effectively. The children differed in age between 4.5 and 5.5 years, and represented a mix of gender and ethnicity.

Certain factors had to be taken into account which could affect the children’s participation in this research. Of fundamental *cultural* importance was their age. The immaturity of children is a biological fact – however, as Prout and James argue, the way in which immaturity is understood and made meaningful is fact of culture (Prout & James, 1997:7). In Scotland, to carry out research with children aged between 4.5 and 5.5 years I needed permission from the children’s parents and the school. The agreement of children to participate was not enough. This raised an ethical issue about opportunities for children to participate, discussed in section 3.3 of this chapter.

Further, Dunlop (2002) found the ephemerality of transition impacted on the children, with some being told by other children or family members what to expect

(both positive and negative experiences) when they went to school. This may have affected the children's responses.

### 3.2.1 The participating institutions

The research was carried out in one local authority in Scotland in one early years setting, *Lilybank*, and four schools. Two of the four schools were in areas described as being of disadvantage. After observing and gathering children's views at *Lilybank* for one year, the fieldwork continued in the four schools over the course of the school year (my visits mirrored the scheduled visits of the children).

### 3.2.2 An introduction to *Lilybank*

*Lilybank* was an environment where various phases of development co-existed. The 57 children between the ages of three months to five years who attended daily could mingle together (Davis, 2012). This idea, argues Thomson (2013), challenges 'traditional developmental beliefs of children following *normal* linear age and stages of development' (Thomson, 2013: 2, also Woodhead, 1999; Adolph & Robinson, 2013 and others), as children of all ages learn from each other. *Lilybank* was also a space where non-verbal (Holt, 2013) and verbal children had the opportunity to participate in the ongoing transformation of the centre (Clark & Gallagher, 2013). Thus, *Lilybank* was a space that was organic and always being transformed (Clark & Gallagher, 2013).

The following extract was taken from an inspection report carried out at *Lilybank*, which is a highly successful centre, judged by a number of criteria, with a national and international reputation:

*Children's learning at Lilybank is outstanding. From the earliest age, children are encouraged to explore and investigate the world around them, both indoors and outdoors. In all areas of the nursery, highly-knowledgeable staff provide comfort, encouragement and stimulation. Because their work is of the highest quality, children develop secure relationships with caring and trusted adults and make excellent progress.*

*The nursery has strong and shared philosophies and values. Adults place trust in children and allow them to drive their own learning. They provide them with stimulating, natural materials to help them develop and learn. Throughout the playrooms, children's*

*experiences are designed to foster independence and decision making. By allowing children to consider hazards and take risks, these skills are developing particularly well.*

*Children's outdoor experiences are of an exceptionally high quality. Here, natural materials provide children with creative and challenging ways to extend their knowledge and understanding, and to develop relationships with the natural world. In the nursery garden, the forest kindergarten and at [the nature kindergarten], a natural woodland space on the outskirts of [the city], children climb, observe wildlife, reflect, play in running water, cook, problem-solve and create imaginary play situations.*

*Younger children's early language skills are encouraged by staff who understand how to do this effectively. Almost all children love to share stories and rhymes with adults and friends, often curling up in a quiet space alone or with a friend to share a book. Many older children create their own plays and perform them to each other, dressing up or using puppets. Through nursery routines and play, staff encourage children's pre-writing skills in relevant contexts.*

*In the [playroom], which caters for children aged three to five, children mark-make during their play, making lists, writing labels for the playroom, marking tickets for their performances or taking charcoal tree rubbings on their hill walks. Commendably, children's understanding of early mathematics is encouraged through real-life contexts and daily routines such as playing games, helping to bake and having snack and lunch. Consequently, almost all have an excellent understanding of numbers. In areas such as early science and technology, children's early skills in enquiry and investigation are developing well. By observing and exploring their natural environment they are beginning to understand their place in the world.*

*Children's creativity is encouraged and promoted in every area of the centre. Children frequently choose to sing, dance and perform using musical instruments or indeed pots and pans and other resources they find around the playroom. Children have begun to share these short films and pictures electronically with parents. Children's learning is also recorded in personal learning plans and we have asked staff to consider how these can be further developed so that they demonstrate children's progress even more easily. The centre has many awards in recognition of its successes, for example as Investors in Children...'*

*(Joint inspection report carried out by an inspecting officer from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and an inspecting officer from the Care Inspectorate, March 2014).*

The main theme of this report suggests that the children were comfortable in their learning environment. We can also take into consideration the claim made by Laevers et al., (1997) that the children at *Lilybank* were like ‘fish in water’, who had the ability to make the best of their learning potential. The inspection team found that the children were engaged, interested and personally motivated to be independent learners. The children knew intrinsically how to investigate their curiosities, without their learning being dictated by others (Davis et al., 2012).

For example, it was noted the children were in control of their learning by self-selecting resources to support it. Children were not ‘taught’ by adults with goal-orientated plans, rather learning was child-led (Bruce, 1987). Importantly, children were trusted to take risks (Lahno, 2001; Cotta, 2007) and to challenge themselves, but were also challenged by highly-skilled adults.

Generations of researchers have debated the value of pre-school experiences to children (Silva & Wiltshire, 1994; Stephen & Brown, 1999; Cassidy, 2005 and others) and have made claims that long-lasting values are influenced within the early years (Ball, 1994). Additionally, there is corroborating evidence which indicates that vital learning dispositions such as an enthusiasm for learning and self-assurance are founded at this stage (Siraj-Blatchford, 1996; Marcon, 2002; Ginsburg, 2007). A mounting body of opinion suggests that these early qualities shape past, present and future learning (Cleave et al., 1982; Renwick, 1984; Pollard, 1996; Ledger et al., 1998; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Margetts, 2002; Fabian & Dunlop and others).

*Lilybank* could be described as a liberating environment where children exercised their democratic rights to participate in social change and transformation of the setting (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Lester & Russell, 2008).

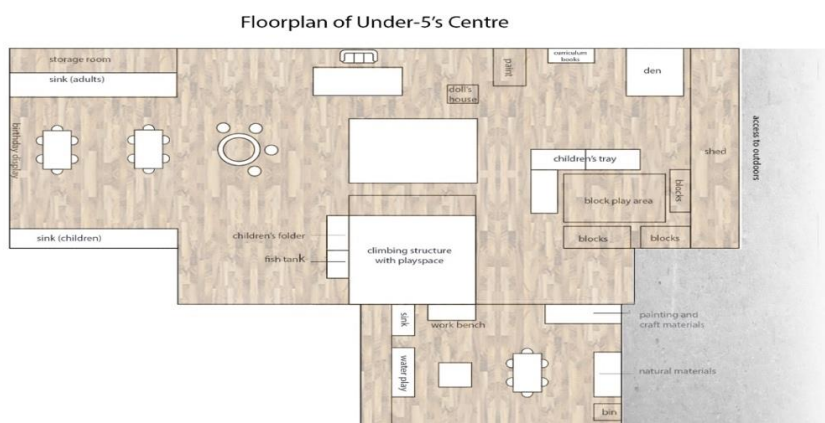


Figure 3: Floor plan of *Lilybank*

*Figure 3* above illustrates the outlines between spaces. Children had access to both indoors and outdoors and there were no limits on where they could go and when. As well as the nursery site, the children also had access to a 26-acre wild site – the nature kindergarten (*Figure 4*) and a beach school which ran two days a week (*Figure 5*).



Figure 4: The nature kindergarten – a 26-acre wild site

My main purpose in introducing *Lilybank* is not to indicate that this is the ideal environment for children, but to illustrate the significant changes in ideology, pedagogy and space that children have to adapt to when they move from an early years setting to a primary school. This observation is not new and can be found discussed in depth by Dunlop & Fabian (2007).



Figure 5: The children at *Lilybank* ventured to the beach two days each week

### 3.2.3 An introduction to the schools

The four school research sites included two open plan classrooms (*Figures 6 and 8*) and two closed door classrooms (*Figures 7 and 9*). All participating schools were of an average size of 300 to 400 pupils and all had a nursery class attached. To avoid

identification, I am not specific here. At the time of the research the participating schools had a Pupil Support Assistant attached to the Primary One classroom.

All four school handbooks covered similar areas; practical information about the school, parental involvement, curriculum and support for pupils. The handbooks also provided information about school structures and technologies, for example:

Before school begins supervision is a parent's responsibility, therefore pupils should not arrive at school until as near to the school start time as possible. Please note that our doors open for pupils at 8.45 to avoid congestion and provide a smoother start for learning (*Northfield* school handbook).

The school child, therefore, was viewed as a universal and passive object, who would wear the school uniform, comply with school opening and closing times, and do the required homework. The child was expected to be shaped by the school institution, developed and educated by the school curriculum and prepared for the future. There was little sense of the child as a social actor, one who could make meanings from their lived school experience. Consequently, influential constructions on how the school child was expected to behave were woven throughout the school literature. The school child, therefore, was homogenously constructed.

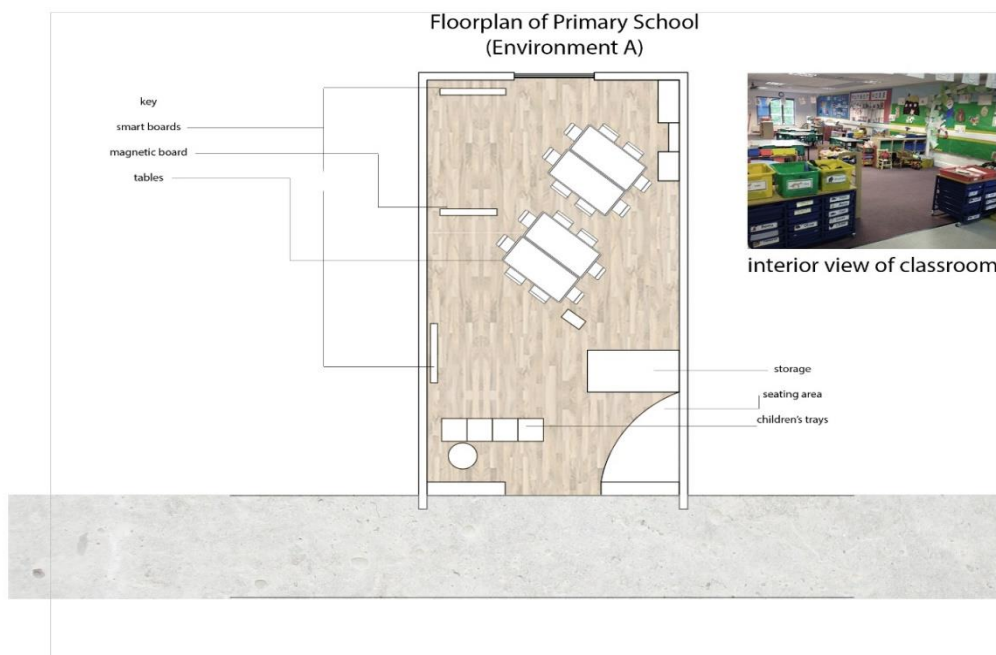


Figure 6: *Northfield* Primary School (open-plan classroom)

The schools were also different from *Lilybank*, in the respect of having more structured environments where children were under the constant gaze of adults (Rooney, 2010), organised in such a way that the teachers had what Foucault (1977) termed the ‘Panoptic’ gaze. The layout of the classroom allowed the adult to ‘see’ the children in all spaces. There were no opportunities for children to be alone. If they were permitted to leave the room, they had to be accompanied by an adult. Thomson (2013) argues that when children are viewed as ‘needing protection’, the space by default belongs to the adult, which prevents children from freely accessing spaces. Consequently, the school classrooms were, as described by Foucault (1977), ‘sites of control’ for ordering children (Walkerdine, 1998; Aitken, 2001). Gallagher (2008) names these ‘sites of control’ as spaces of ‘omnipresent surveillance’.



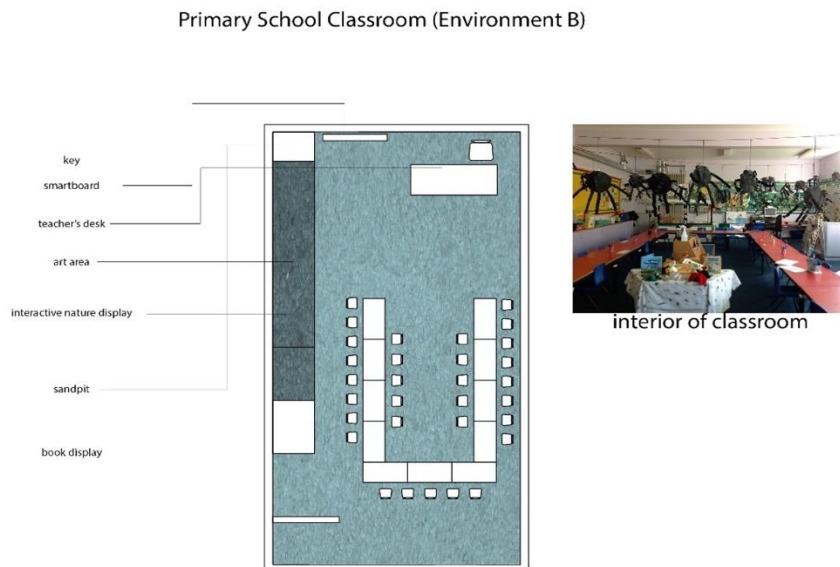


Figure 7: *Southfield* classroom (closed classroom)

In contrast to *Lilybank*, at the school children were told where to sit, who they were to sit beside, and what they were to do when they were situated. In this way, it could be argued that they were subordinate in their status to adults. For example, when the children left before the Easter break in *Southfield* school, their tables and chairs were in small squares. When the children returned, the tables were all connected in a U shape. Adults constructed the environment to meet their plans. The children were slightly disorientated until they found their space. Collins and Coleman (2008) call upon adults to consider the impact these changes have on children's lives (also Rasmussen), 2004).

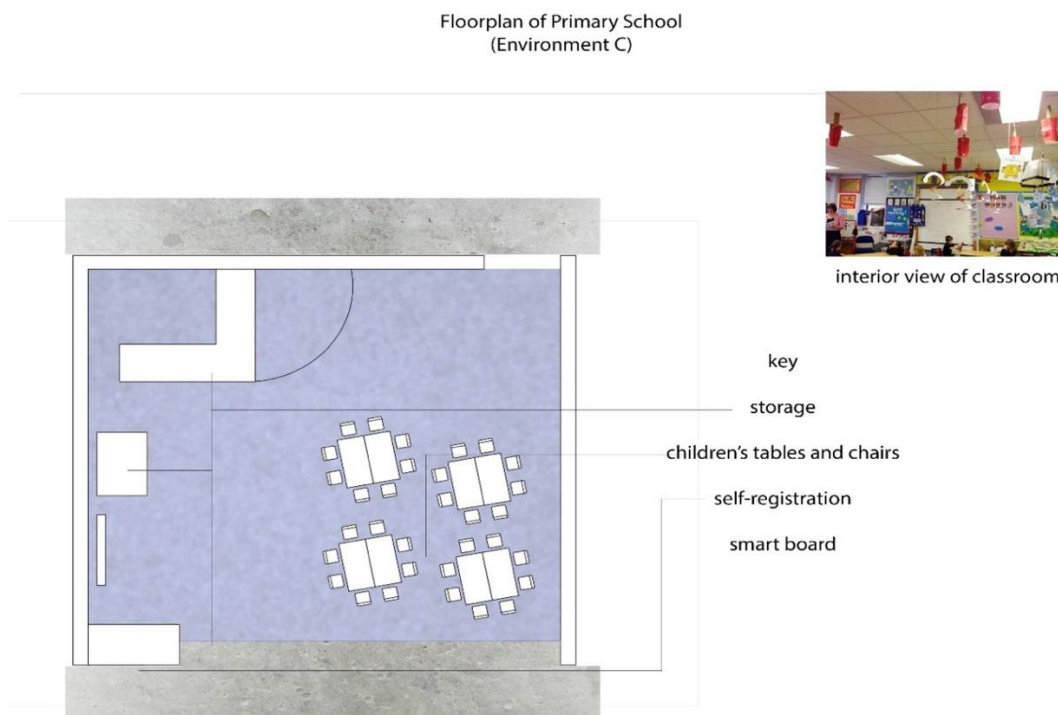


Figure 8: *Eastfield* Primary School (open-plan classroom)

All the schools had an outside space, which varied greatly according to each site. One had a small area paved with flagstones sectioned off from the main playground, another had two acres of land where children could run on the grass on dry days. All the school playgrounds were sites of control (Foucault, 1977) where children were closely monitored by adults.

The school institutions brought to mind Deleuze's (1999) concept of emergent 'societies of control' where both children (and adults) had little opportunity to 'do what [they] want'. There were two open-plan classrooms, which presented as a kind of freedom. However, while the teachers were freed from the enclosed space of a traditional classroom, they were always being observed as other teachers, including the head teacher, could walk back at any time to monitor practice.

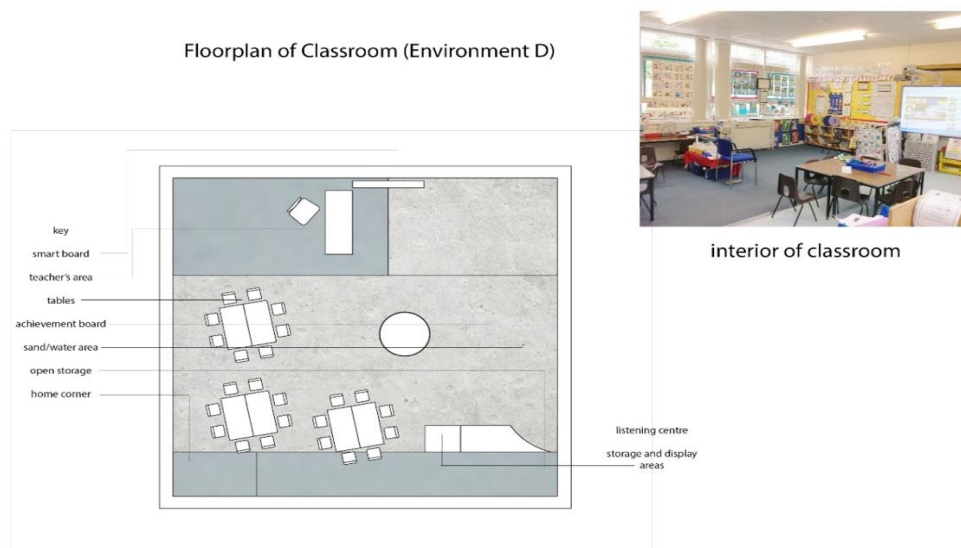


Figure 9: *Westfield Primary School* (closed classroom)

Having provided a brief introduction to the research settings I will now conclude this chapter by explaining my ethical approach to this study.

### 3.3 Adopting an ethical approach

Ethics begins with the recognition of the need for the other, of the need for the other's recognition. It proceeds, in other words, from an inter-dependency of caring and responsibility that cannot be separated from the pluralism and relativism of multiple identities. An ethical way of being emerges when we recognise the very necessity of heterogeneity for understanding ourselves and others (Der Derian 1997:58).

Ethical approval was given by the University of Edinburgh's ethics committee. It is suggested that ethical approval is not enough (Steinby & Klapuri, 2013) and that researchers need to constantly reflect and be reflexive of their own ethical practice in their own lived research experiences.

In agreement with Steinby and Klapuri (2013), ethical practice can be complex. For example, researching children's lives raised a number of methodological concerns over informed consent, privacy and autonomy, harm and exploitation.

Although these concerns are not unique to children, there are dilemmas in relation to the unequal power relationships, mainly age-related (Mayall, 1994). However, as Gallagher (2008) argued, the complex set of power relationships that can complicate the field cannot be controlled and that adult researchers are likely to reconfigure power relations, not force them on the less dominant child:

...power could not be reconceptualised as a form of action carried out through multivalent strategies and tactics, rather a commodity or capacity. This complicates the view of adults as powerful and children as powerless (Gallagher, 2008:147).

The ethical approach to this research was informed by my own worldviews and paradigms and these, combined with the ethical pathways, informed the conduct and writing of this qualitative study (Creswell, 2007:15). Scott-Jones and Watt (2010) claim:

...all social science researchers take ethics seriously...ethnographers view ethics as an active part of their research, rather than something to be sorted out prior to fieldwork. Hence at the heart of this claim it is obvious that the authors view an ethnographer's role as political, commenting on this they add 'for most ethnographers, there is a concern to empower rather than disempower participants' (Scott-Jones & Watt, 2010:9).

It is argued that this political desire is based on morality – the desire to do the right thing. As Greenback (2003) argues, moral values play a significant role, but other values also impact ethical decisions as 'moral values do not operate in a vacuum' (Greenback, 2003:791). In the most simplistic of explanations, ethics 'offers a categorical distinction between right and wrong applicable to and by everyone, irrespective of social or historical context or circumstances' (Dahlberg & Moss, 2007:66).

The core ethical issues of research are informed consent, privacy and autonomy, harm and exploitation. These categorisations served to shed some light on the main ethical concerns in this research. While considerations towards good ethical research were designed and defined at the outset, ethics were reviewed regularly for transparency. It was intended that by doing so the elimination (or reduction) of bias

would be considered throughout – from when I originally sought informed consent to the dissemination of the research. It is inexorable bias and it is unlikely that it was fully eradicated in this value-laden qualitative research. However, as the children were involved as much as possible as co-researchers and supported the interpretation of the data where possible, this may have counter-balanced my values (Greenbank, 2003). For example, in this study I planned to go by my first name as is customary in the early years setting. But this marked tone of informality was not acceptable in all schools.

Goodall (2000) explores the ethics of writing ethnography, and warns:

Editing a new ethnography...brings with it new ethical considerations. To edit the voice – as well as what is said – is to determine how character and ability of the narrator could be, and perhaps should be improved. But improved when? and improved how? and for whom? It is also to ask the ethnographer to change a representation of something that supposedly occurred. Is this ethical? (Goodall, 2000:165).

For the ethnographer, the application of ethical principles of writing research are of paramount concern. The ethnographer's role is that of a 'learner' (Davis, 2000:192). The ethnographer, then, is not a positivist, but someone who sojourns, or 'ponders' (Malinowski, 1961; 67); someone who is open to making the familiar strange, who challenges the monolithic view of the distinct contextualised culture of Scottish school children.

### **3.3.1 Informed consent**

In research, children can be treated as subordinates (Harwood, 2010). For example, in the 'best interests' of children, adults (parents, professionals, and individuals on ethical boards) make decisions about ethical approval. Consent was obtained from the Director of Children and Families, the head teachers from the participating schools and the parents of the children. Copies of information sheets and consent forms are enclosed in the appendix of this thesis (Page 263). I spoke to the parents personally, distributing and collecting the signed forms. Despite consent being given

by adults, deliberate efforts were made throughout this research to live alongside children as active participants of the research processes (Conroy & Harcourt, 2009).

In *Lilybank*, unlike some other settings, children were often asked their opinion and therefore I ensured that I allocated time to explain to the children what was being asked of them. This was essential in trying to eliminate or, more realistically, reduce the asymmetrical adult /child power relations. It is important to note that ‘while the researcher can make every effort to explain the nature and purpose of intended research; it cannot be assumed that this has been properly understood’ (Hart & Tyrer, 2006:22). I was aware that the children and their families would only share their perspectives if the atmosphere was conducive to transparency.

Therefore, I hoped that being as open as possible would enhance the research process. I shared the information with the children in a way that they could assimilate and respond to. I informed the children that I was keen to find out what they thought about things; *What would you like to do when at school? What do you know about school?* When space was made for them, the children expressed themselves clearly about things that interested them (Mauthner, 1997).

Children could also ‘assent’ (Alderson, 2000). According to the theory of assent, researchers need to be attuned to children. This attunement encouraged me to reflect on whether the children wished to be included or not. Regarding this, I took care to be vigilant, ensuring that I was reading their body language accurately (Einarsdottir, 2007a; Robson, 2011). The children were also informed that they could refuse to be involved. This was of the utmost importance to me. When teachers or parents suggested that the children should speak to me, and it looked to me as if they were intrigued by something else, I sensitively explained to them that the children should not feel pressured to comply.

As a formalised way of deriving children’s ‘informed consent’ (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Greig & Taylor, 1999), I and the class teacher invited children to participate in mind-mapping sessions. This was an opportunity where children could have their voices heard. I agree with others – for example Spyrou (2011) – that an open, transparent, critically reflexive approach to child voice research ‘needs to take into account the actual research contexts in which children’s voices are provided and the power imbalances that shape them’ (Spyrou, 2011:152).

The area where the mind-mapping sessions took place was a quiet and familiar environment to the children; this was a space where the children's views were sought, more formally, on matters that concerned them. It made sense to carry out the research in this environment (*Figure 10*).



Figure 10: The space where mind-mapping sessions took place.

### 3.3.2 Privacy and autonomy

Some issues of accessing children privately arose. One of those was intergenerational inequalities – for example, not all teachers shared the conception of the child's right to privacy, confidentiality and autonomy (Mauthner, 1997). As Barker and Weller discovered:

...the space in which research is undertaken has a significant impact upon the research process...schools are highly significant spaces and

times in the geography of children's lives...despite being in places in which children spend a great deal of time, they are spaces in which children have little or no control (Barker & Weller, 2003: 211).

The children's homes, too, had their own micro-geographies with sets of familial power relations (Sibley, 1995). During the interviews some parents wished to be present. This meant that, on certain occasions, some parents exerted control over the children's responses. It was not unusual for parents to answer the question for their child. However, there was an occasion when one child, Philip, interrupted his parents, explaining they had answered wrongly. He proceeded to answer from his own knowledge of the experience. At times parents were interrupted when children wandered in and out of the room, making requests to go out to play. This may have restricted particular conversations.

Parents offered possible solutions to individual problems, such as suggesting a shift in locale, or that I come to the house after the child was in bed. These allowed parents to set their own agendas and talk about their daily lives and views. I also gathered children's views from both home and school. I discovered that if the children wanted me to know something, they did – if not at home, at school; if not at school, at home. My role as the researcher was to ensure that each participant got their say.

Anonymity was preserved by the use of aliases for participants and the centres, as well as their exact geographical locations. The children chose their own names – interestingly, some children changed their alias more than once throughout the study.

The pseudonyms used by the children included: Alba (girl, of Scottish / Italian parentage – born in Scotland), Bella, (girl of British parentage), Charlie ( boy, of British parentage), Cloud-Ace (boy of British parentage), Cristiano Ronaldo (boy of Scottish / Finish parentage), Elsa (girl, of Indian parentage), Hazel (girl of British parentage), Lily (girl of Scottish / Dutch parentage), Me Me,(girl of Asian / Scottish parentage) Ninja Rock (boy of British parentage), Peter (boy of British parentage), Philip (boy of British parentage), Superman (girl of Asian / Scottish parentage), Sweety (girl of Scottish / Spanish parentage), Thomas the Tank Engine (boy of Indian parentage) and William (boy of Australian parentage).



The data was recorded in composite groups and not written up in individual terms (Creswell, 2007). I securely stored all information which may have revealed the identity of the participants and the setting through the use of locked cabinets and password-protected files for electronic material. I was also aware that quotations can unduly specify a person and sought to ensure that people could not otherwise be identified.

### **3.3.3 Harm and exploitation**

The risk of having an informal research setting such as the early years centre, and/or the children's homes, was that the children and their parents may have felt a sense of obligation to 'provide' data. It is delusional to think that as an insider I would not have influenced the research and I was aware that some children and families may have had complex desires to please me (Cannella & Lincoln, 2007). I had built up trust with the children and parents over years and throughout I took care not to mislead participants. I consciously made efforts to eliminate or reduce the perceived power imbalance, by stating clearly from the outset that everyone invited to participate had involvement at every stage.

### **3.4 The rise of power in the transition to school**

This final section: *The rise of power in the transition to school* communicates my discovery of Foucault and Bakhtin and how their ideas, methodologically, have supported the analysis of this thesis. Some of the research highlighted a lack of empirical data on children's (and adults') subjectivities on transition. This revealed power imbalances (empowerment and disempowerment) that children (and adults) experience. Foucauldian understandings of power as complex, interrelated and in flux, provided a platform for this study to analyse power understandings of power imbalances and answer the question: *How fluid are the power relations in transition?* Notably, neither Foucault nor Bakhtin wrote for transition, and furthermore, their roots and basic ideologies are dissimilar, e.g., whilst Foucault did write about education, Bakhtin, only tangentially, did. Furthermore, Bakhtin was limited in responding to issues surrounding power in a Foucauldian sense, however Foucault's

subsequent recognition of subjectivity puts agency at its centre and this was Bakhtin's orientation.

None of the transition research reviewed considered power as a concept in transitions for that reason this first part of this section draws heavily from the work of Michel Foucault, as according to Koupal (2012), 'Foucault's work has had great influence in different academic domains, not least in education' (Koupal, 2012:36). Foucault (1991) states that power is everywhere, in all of us, and it is never static; power is productive as well as coercive, that with power, resistance exists, and that resistance can take place where regulation, surveillance and subjugation are least able to reach. Foucault was not without his critics,

### **3.4.1 Transition involves power**

As an unintended consequence the focus of this section is on power. At the outset of this thesis I had not considered the literature on power. However, the data encouraged me to rethink my ideas and extend my research to looking at the potency of power as a social phenomenon of transition. I shall mostly draw on Foucault because of his influence on academic domains, in particular the humanities and social sciences. He regularly linked his analysis of power to educational institutions and was well-known for his analysis of such institutions (King, 2004; Deacon, 2006; Koupal, 2012). He challenged the idea that power is exercised by individuals, groups, or both, by way of intermittent acts of dominant control, seeing power as diffused and ubiquitous. This supported my understanding of power, like transition, could be a fluid entity.

We must note at the outset that power is a peculiar concept one that must be characterised as essentially contested. That is different theories of power rest on different assumptions about both the content of existence and the ways we have come to know it. That is different theories of power rest on different ontologies and epistemologies (Hartsock, 1990:158).

Specific writers view power as characterised by its innate conflict between the user and subject, (also Lukes, 1975; Connolly, 1983; Hartsock, 1990; MacNaughton, 2005). Writing on power is denoted by extensive and ostensibly problematic

differences over how it should be conceptualised or characterised. Morris (2002) disagrees with the above writers on the basis that power is a disposition; which influences other agents' actions and their disposition to act.

Various definitions of power exist, ranging from the fundamental – ‘The capacity or ability to influence the behaviour of others or the course of events’ (Oxford Dictionary [online], 2015) to more complex interpretations from influential thinkers such as Foucault (1977; 1998) and Butler (1990; 1993; 1997). Foucault (1977) outlined the basic tenets of power:

- *Power is not a thing but a relation.*
- *Power is not simply repressive but it is productive.*
- *Power is not simply a property of the State. Power is not something that is exclusively localised in government and the State (which is not a universal essence). Rather, power is exercised throughout the social body.*
- *Power operates at the micro-levels of social relations. Power is omnipresent at every level of the social body.*
- *The exercise of power is strategic and warlike.*

(O’Farrell, 2007:9).

Foucault’s tenets of power illustrate that he used concepts which are neither ‘evaluative’ nor ‘antithetical’ to freedom (Patton, 1989:260). Power for Foucault was not a thing to be possessed, nor was it essentially negative (Knights & Wilmott, 1999). Foucault defined power by three disparate ideas, the first being *sovereign* power, which includes conforming to the law or central authority, in this case the school institution. The second, *disciplinary* power is a mechanism used to regulate the behaviour of individuals in the social body, such as conforming to the school timetable. Space is also regulated if children are informed where to go and where to sit while actions and behaviour are also regulated, such as children being expected to comply with the organisation and rules of the school.

Here Foucault’s discussion on the ‘docile bodies’ can be understood, where children are both able and submissive (Foucault, 1977). Disciplinary power is carried out through surveillance mechanisms. However, Foucault insisted that ‘power is not discipline rather discipline is simply one way in which power can be exercised’

(Koupal, 2012:37). The third type of power, *pastoral* power, controls the conduct of individuals or groups of people, through political organisation and actuarial classification.

The importance of Foucault's work is his emphasis on the undercurrents of power – who gets to participate and who gets excluded, by categorising, labelling and isolating (Stahl, 2004). Being able to describe the various forms which power takes is instrumental in the description of its manifestations, which come in the form of action. Therefore, action is the result of power, just as a force is invisible, but its results are perceptible.

According to Gaventa (2003), Foucault's characterisations have been instrumental in shaping the understanding of power:

His work marks a radical departure from previous modes of conceiving power and cannot be easily integrated with previous ideas, as power is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them (Gaventa, 2003:1).

Foucault confronted the idea that power was manipulated by individuals or groups, as independent acts of control, arguing that power was ubiquitous: 'Power is everywhere and comes from everywhere so in this sense it is neither an agency nor a structure' (Foucault, 1998: 63). He applied the term 'power/knowledge' to indicate that power is created through agreed forms of knowledge, scientific understandings and truth. He argued:

...in a society such as ours, but basically any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse (Foucault in Gordon, 1980 :93).

What Foucault put forward was that there could be no exercise of power without accepted 'truths':

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991).

This passage articulates nicely how truth regulates power. School institutions, for example, are known to be powerful, often grandiose edifices where the entrance doors are closed off to society for most of the day (Day, Harris & Hatfield, 2003; Marzano, 2003; Gallagher, 2004). The manifolds of domination which are exercised in the institution are accepted truths. For instance, there is an expectation that when children go behind the doors of the school institution they will learn what they *need* to survive in society, and that the attending children will learn from the professionals within the institution.

One accepted 'societal' truth is that the professionals are knowledgeable (Nassaji & Wells, 2000). In Foucault's thinking, knowledge is always related to domination (Panneerselvam, 2000). Children are entrusted to the school institution by their parents and knowledge is transmitted from the institution to the children. This produces the accepted truth that the teachers are knowledgeable.

However, accepted truths are beginning to be contested, with some writers claiming that there are no general objectives upon which our beliefs can be accepted, or to which they can be confirmed. For example, as Macdonald comments: 'Humankind must kick away the metaphysical crutch upon which all knowledge was, until comparatively recently, presumed to rely' (Macdonald, 2011:7). If the metaphysical crutch is kicked away, this could open up the question of whether teachers are always more knowledgeable than children or do children have knowledge to teach the adults? Here Macdonald presents a basic dilemma – how do we progress from the fallacy of accepted truths?

Power, for Foucault was also seen as a basis of social discipline and compliance. In *Surveiller et Punir* (1975), translated as *Discipline and Punish* in 1977, Foucault explored Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon (Schofield, 2009). The Panopticon was a

circular prison where inmates were under constant surveillance by omnipresent prison guards, positioned in the centre of the structure. Panopticon refers to obtaining power over the minds of prisoners and encouraging them to police themselves.

Advancing Bentham's ideas, it was in *Discipline and Punish* that Foucault wrote about individuals and groups disciplining themselves. He wrote of the enclosed, segmented spaces of prisons, hospitals (particularly for the mentally ill) and schools, where inmates, patients and schoolchildren were observed at every point, in which each individual was constantly located, their movements supervised and where all events were recorded.

Making inmates, patients and children constantly aware of being observed by the guard, the nurse, or the teacher – and the possibility of unacceptable behaviours being detected – was enough to prevent the undesirable behaviours being carried out. 'If they are school children there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time' (Foucault, 1977: 200–201). The expectation is that children's thoughts are reformulated within adult boundaries (Hendrick, 1997).

Here, Foucault (1977) was influential in highlighting the ways in which children discipline themselves without pressure from others. One of the principles of the school institution is to create self-reliant children (Coles & Southworth, 2005). One way schools foster self-reliance is through the buddy system, where reliable older children are put in charge of younger children who have recently transitioned to the school. The buddies oversee the rest of the population, taking care to ensure their behaviour is of the high standard expected by the institution. In this regard, power becomes an embodied and socialised phenomenon, occasioned and aggravated by the sense that society is under constant surveillance (Foucault, 1977, also Gardiner, 2016).

However, Foucault argued that with power, and subsequent subjectification, as experienced by the transitioning children above, there were also possibilities for action and resistance (also Tallant, 2015). The three inextricably linked concepts of power, subjectification and resistance were 'integral to Foucault's theoretical projects' (Heller, 1996:79). Foucault argued:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power (Foucault, 1978:95).

As indicated above, Foucault was concerned with abilities to distinguish and examine, politically question and interrogate accepted truths. This was not to emerge with an absolute truth, but to remove power of truth from ‘the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time’ (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1971:75).

Power, subjectification and resistance, for Foucault, were part of life – omnipresent and ubiquitous. Power could not be, nor should be, abolished. The question that Foucault encouraged was ‘what forms of power do we want to live with and which forms do we wish to limit or prevent?’ (Thorpe, 2012: no pagination). Revolution was always achievable for Foucault. Power does not just respond to resistance, nor is it simply led by it. Resistive forms of power are at its very core, Foucault contended:

You see, if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations, because it would simply be a matter of obedience, you have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you’re not doing what you want. So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. So I think that resistance is the main word, the key word of this dynamic. (Foucault, in De Giorgi, 1988:141)

Resistance, according to Foucault, is complex as it is located everywhere. For example, in the closed school institution, power exists through complex practices and discourses which define the strategies, organisational principles and pedagogical practices. However, as argued by Foucault:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it...We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it,

renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart (Foucault, 1998: 100-101).

The notion of discourse is crucial for our understanding of power, for this notion opens the way to awareness of how power becomes *naturalised*. Hartsock (1990) contends that discourses on power surround virility and masculinity. In consequence, male and masculine discourses impact on the structure of society and subsequently define subordination. We may concede that such a view vastly underrates the complexity and diversity of society – however as Foucault argued above, discourses transmit and produce power which, unquestioned, allows us to reconcile ourselves to the way things are.

Worthy of mention here, the data in this thesis did not specifically focus on gender. The importance of gender did not become fully clear to me until I had analysed the data, as the research concerned both girls and boys and so could not be considered gender neutral, and so intertwined empirically in the process of transition; although to unpack this point would be beyond the scope of this study, however, it may be followed up at a later point, it was worthy of a brief mention here.

Proving a useful point of comparison on power is Butler (1990; 1993; 1997). Butler is a strong exponent of the aspect of *gender* in relation to power. One of the points that she makes is that gender is very powerful in the way that it comes to be regarded as natural – boys become known as boisterous and girls become recognised as more caring and not as strong as men (Butler, 1990). She argues that we let gender define us, when actually gender is performed. Therefore, gender is a social construct (Heywood, 1994; Burr, 2003), but also one that each person can shape for themselves. It may be useful to stop and think about the concept of social construction here, as it emerges at times throughout this work. One of the limits of social construction comes from Rorty, who argues:

All our controversial ways of talking are, to be sure, choices that society has made about how to classify things. In that sense these classifications are of course socially constructed. But the interesting question is whether anybody can suggest a better classification (Rorty, 1999: 120).



Butler (1990) explains that gender cannot be considered as a form of identity without including other categories, such as race, class or ethnicity. Subsequently, concerns regarding gender – such as girls and boys being physically separated in class and not encouraged to play with one another – were raised by children and parents. Butler's analysis of power,

...enables us to rethink our understandings of [children] who are marginalised in schools, and also has strong implications for the ethics of teaching practice. What Butler does not do, as a philosopher, is link her analysis to the details of everyday lives of educational settings. (Davies, 2006:425).

Therefore, I chose not to draw specifically, from Butler. I found Foucault's ideas of power being in constant flux betwixt and between others supported my analysis.

### **3.4.2 Critiquing ideas of power**

Under careful scrutiny, Foucault's theory has much value. For example, he was prepared to abandon the search for the right answer and this perspective encouraged me to be open to the views of participants in the field settings and to question my own, taken for granted, personal and professional perspectives. Similarly, Foucault helped me realise that when it comes to power there are many perspectives to consider. Power is not simply about subjugation – power includes resistance.

I was interested for the purposes of categorising, defining and identifying the various forms, results and outcomes of power structures to use Foucault's analytics as a lens through which the data I have collected can be viewed and interpreted. Foucault's analytics as a lens was particularly useful when questioning accepted truths in the school institution. Writing on the fluidity of power also raised questions as to whether different types of power are observable, both in the classroom and the transitional phase.

I did not seek to rigidly apply Foucault's theories, but I was intrigued to see if they had meaning in relation to my data, and found they did. I also wondered if Foucault's ideas of power and resistance had meaning for children, parents and

professionals – did they routinely resist the ecological structures of transition. I was also interested to find out if the views of children, parents and professionals on power relating to schooling and transition might enable me to develop a critique of ecological theory and also critique and advance the work of Foucault. However, I was just as wary of accepting Foucault’s truths as accepting the truths of the ecological model of transition. This led me to investigate a number of critiques of Foucault’s work.

### **3.4.3 Critiques of Foucauldian conceptions of power**

As power has emerged as a social phenomenon of transition, I am especially interested in how Foucault’s theory of power has been interpreted by other writers (Gutting, 2005; Kelly, 2009).

While not aspiring to provide an exhaustive account, I briefly outline the vehement contentions from various philosophical perspectives, such as Jurgen Habermas and Richard Rorty, who, although expressing different arguments identify voids in Foucault’s work, regarding liberal values and philosophy. It could be argued that Foucault’s liberalism is inconsequential to his assertions of power, but I would argue that this knowledge underpins some other writers’ understandings of these ideas, such as Rorty (1991).

I will not seek to provide a comprehensive rebuttal of Foucauldian critiques; I cannot, in a section of this length, do justice to the many other critical viewpoints such as those of Patton (1998) who claimed that Foucault’s work suggested there was no escape from domination, and that Foucault’s work was oppressive and despairing in tone, which resulted in pessimistic activism. It is fair to note that, for the most part, critics of Foucault make similar observations around the themes that Foucault’s work is positioned to the ‘self’, is thus preoccupied with individuality, and that any responsibility to ‘others’ is indifferent (Kelly, 2009).

My hope here is to illustrate that, despite Foucault’s influence in academic domains (Koupal, 2012), his work has created disagreement (Garland, 1986), and then to explain the questions this disagreement raised for my study. While it is claimed by some that Foucault’s critics are ‘timid’ (Zamora, 2014), those thinkers who have claimed his work is untenable cannot be ignored. For example, Boyne

(2001) indicates that Foucault's work has been 'criticised for its inaccuracies, its parochialism...its romanticism and the tortuousness of its gnomic pronouncements' (Boyne, 2001:1). Finally, I hope to show that there is a 'genuine struggle' in Foucault's work (Balibar, 1992:39).

In the main, philosophers have taken exception to what they identify as the nihilism of Foucault's critique of the Enlightenment. By exposing only the damaging characteristics of the Age of Reason, they contend that Foucault denies the importance of certain liberties and progress that came about with Enlightenment thinking (Huffer, 2010). He is further accused of attacking 'stable structures of meaning' (Pollock & Cox, 1991:170). The authors argue that Foucault, who notably criticises himself, does not give others a way of determining which theories are more desirable than others, or indeed, specifically, which use of power is more legitimate than another (Kelly, 2009).

Foucault's refusal to openly express his own position has led to a common misunderstanding of his key points (Kelly, 2009). Perhaps it is not surprising that Pollock and Cox acrimoniously write of being 'dazzled' and 'exhausted' by Foucault's discursive openness of postmodernism and accuse him of fostering nihilism and relativism (Patton, 1998) – although Foucault claims to be neither a postmodernist, nor a poststructuralist, and that his interests considered *modernity* and its definition.

This accusation is shared by others, with Foucault's impartial account of mechanisms of power also criticised, some claiming Foucault's theory on power is incoherent (Patton, 1989). The same basic orientation is shared by the philosopher Habermas, who in the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) claimed Foucault's theory of power was so broad it was hard to separate from mere influence.

...over-generalising and universalising; reductionist; contradictory in its role as a concept of empirical analysis and as a transcendental theory of constitution; and most importantly as crypto normative (Habermas in Daniels, 2002, no pagination).

The main argument posed by Habermas (1987) is Foucault's lack of commitment to normative judgments, and in particular that Foucault's work heralds no alternative

to domination. This has resulted in Habermas declaring that Foucault's theory on power is theoretically deficient; arguing denotatively that the *universalistic* idea of power put forward by Foucault offers no alternative and that Foucault does not differentiate what are acceptable or unacceptable uses of power.

Going one step further, Habermas claims that Foucault tries to have it both ways by being radically sceptical and autonomous; he poses the unequivocal question, 'Why fight at all?' He frames this question by reference to the familiar analyses of others, (such as Rorty, 1991) and the inevitability that as all is futile (Habermas, 1987). It is from this fundamental assertion that the accusation of fostering nihilism proceeds. This is important for my study to consider – being a practitioner in the field I am unable to claim Foucauldian autonomy (even if such a position was tenable).

However, these two philosophical viewpoints from Habermas and Foucault share commonalities. Firstly, both aim to be critical in order to enrich human circumstances and the point at which they both coincide is when they argue that the justification and exploitation of power are among the most significant problems of society. The similarities end there, however, as overall their work is fundamentally incommensurable – they disagree as to how one can best grasp and act upon those problems.

In an attempt to understand Foucault (1977)'s position, it is important to return to the 18th century Enlightenment period (Gregor, 1996). In his re-interpretation of Kant's Enlightenment theory, Foucault discarded notions of reason, emancipation and progress believing that the recent modern forms of power and knowledge which emerged from the Enlightenment served to create new forms of domination. While Rorty (1991) acknowledged that Foucault (1977) was successful in his revelation of 'bad' power, he argued that Foucault failed to explore how 'good' power was productive. The essence of Rorty's argument is that Foucault could unmask all kinds of oppressive power, claiming that negative power was inherent in all aspects of society, but was blind as to how 'good' uses of power had enhanced current experiences of democracy.

In Rorty's view, Foucault failed in his examination of the present and the past, but also failed at envisioning the future, undoubtedly something no politics can do

without. A significant point of contention for Rorty was how Foucault dismissed the idea of bourgeois liberalism:

I don't see what Foucault had against bourgeois liberalism, except that in France in the Fifties and Sixties it just wasn't respectable to be a bourgeois liberal. I don't think he has any arguments against it or anything better to suggest. (Rorty, 2006:30).

While Rorty (1991) agreed that Foucault's politics could be linked to the liberal understanding of the task that politics had to accomplish, he was not convinced by his genuine allegiance to them (Macdonald, 2011). He accused Foucault of using a 'banal moral vocabulary' (Rorty, 1991:196) and expressing a 'claptrap about depression', claiming Foucault was an elitist (Rorty, 2003:47). Rorty (1991), argued Foucault:

...ran together his moral and ethical identity his sense of responsibility to others and his *rapport a soi*. At these times, like Nietzsche, he projected his own search for autonomy out into public space (Rorty, 1991:194).

Fundamentally, Rorty argued that Foucault was not willing to accept the liberal insistence of the necessity of the private/public split and argued that Foucault claimed, on the one hand, that he was a citizen of a democratic country, with a definite moral identity, while on the other he was still searching for an autonomous being (Shulenberg, 2015). These two roles, one strictly private and the other absolutely public, cannot be agreed with each other at a single moment. This critique raised questions for my own role in the study on transition – I was aware that my personal and professional identities would impact on the way I carried out my study.

In spite of all Rorty's frustrations with Foucault he complimented him, saying he was a 'remarkable man of great imagination' and an 'impressive intellectual figure' (Macdonald, 2011).

Criticisms of Foucault's position have been critiqued themselves for failing to take into account the realities of the post-enlightenment landscape from which he was drawing his observations. Foucauldian thought was a response to the elitism of the now centuries old intellectual class, formed from the fracturing of the elite class

into upper-middle class. Foucault had merely set himself out to be concerned with the identification of power, the inherent resistances that power created and also, subsequently, the new ways that the original means of power manifested themselves in those resistances. It would be dismissive to set aside all of Foucault's now invaluable observations due to their lack of alternative.

According to Huffer (2010), the most famous philosophical critique of Foucault comes from Jacques Derrida. Derrida, well known as the founder of Deconstructivism, found common ground with Foucault on power and ethics, but disagreed with Foucault on '...their differing conceptions of textuality, language and dialectical thinking' – regarding their differing views of Descartes (Huffer, 2010:26, also Kelly, 2009).

In his 1967 canonical work *Of Grammatology (De la Grammatologie)*, Derrida opens with a review of Saussure's linguistic structuralism. Derrida wrote that words glean significance from associations both to words and things. In turn, these have associations of importance to other things. These then could be described as signifiers of signifiers, as well as being themselves signified, rather than gaining significance from the words alone. Since, in phonetic languages, the written word is understood as a signifier that relates to another signifier (the spoken word), Derrida takes writing as his model for grasping all reality.

It is rather perplexing for Derrida to disagree with Foucault's understanding of language, when his own conception of language was that all words were inherently multifarious, layered and ambiguous. However, it was principally within the discourse of 'madness' that the two scholars disagreed, as Foucault asserted that madness itself was impossible to describe (similar to his thinking on power), due to the ambiguity of the human language, and thus a person experiencing madness would not be able to communicate their impressions with complete accuracy for the listener, whereas Derrida, being from a psychoanalytical background, believed that language was the only medium through which perceptions of insanity might be shared.

When connecting this critique for my study I set out to avoid over influencing participants' perspectives, but I was also aware that my status as a professional in itself meant that I would not approach my study from the perspective of some

disinterested academic. Indeed, I was more hopeful than Foucault that I may be able to utilise what children, parents and professionals said during my study, to delineate solutions to the issues that they identified concerning transitions.

#### **3.4.4 Summary of the critiques of Foucault**

In this section I did not set out to make a case against Foucault, but to highlight some of the critiques against his work.

Summarising the problems, one of the main criticisms of Foucault is that he discarded liberal values and philosophy connected with the Enlightenment, while at the same time relied on them and benefited from their effects in his lifetime.

Another criticism was that he did not have a single, conclusive doctrine and that he rejected rational order – of particular note was that his theory on power was incoherent. Others noted in his work a lingering commitment to constantly question and destabilise ‘structures of meaning’ creating a ‘no true’ world (Pollock & Cox, 1991). Foucault, it would seem, was good at exposing problematic practices but less so in offering alternatives.

However, as a hybrid philosopher-historian, Foucault was able to tie the ambiguity and generalisation of the philosopher with the research of the past. That is, while philosophers generally endeavour to provide solutions, historians are not obliged to provide an alternative for the past – it is in this subtle transgression between the two disciplines that Foucault manages to excuse himself.

All things said, for the most part, I continue to be interested in Foucault. I do not intend to glorify him, as I too find some aspects of his work untenable. However, admittedly, I do differ from previous critics as, despite the ubiquity of contradiction, I find his work useful. I am interested in seeing what can be done with and to Foucault. The notion of a ‘no true world’ that is perspectival in nature is interesting to me as it may provide a challenge to developmental psychology.

The observation that Foucault ‘destabilises’, may indeed be accurate – my research, however, is not concerned with the rigidity of power structures, but merely in identifying them in practice. My reason for attempting to build on Foucault is that his lack of rigidity helps me go far beyond transitions as a one-off happening, to

begin to see if others view it as a fluid concept that includes issues of power and that can be explored with others through a creative lens. Therefore, it made sense for this thesis to use Foucauldian ideas as a backdrop to understanding what was observed and then to see if it helped this thesis to draw conclusions on the systems of transition analysed as a whole. This leads me to one last point.

To distinguish analytically between Foucault and Bakhtin for the purpose of this these I have focussed solely on the concept of power, as power has been the intellectual thread of this section, and it is through the concept of power I find the complimentary aspects of Foucault and Bakhtin. A fuller analytical discussion of Foucault and Bakhtin is beyond the scope of this thesis.

### **3.4.5 Bakhtin's Power - Heteroglossia**

As indicated, I came to Bakhtin late in this study, but I found his work too important to ignore, I had no recourse but to add his philosophy to support the analysis of this study, arguably to a very limited degree.

Before I explore Bakhtin's treatment (or claimed non-treatment) of power it may be prudent to provide, albeit a succinct, introduction to Bakhtin. According to Robinson (2011) Mikhail Bakhtin was one of the valuable theorists of discourse in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, Robinson attests that Bakhtin was the most important Soviet thinker in the social sciences. Working under the rule of Stalin, his work had considerable significance for issues of political resistance. Robinson explains:

Sometimes associated with Russian formalism, Bakhtin operates somewhere between a structural and constructivist approach to discourse. Bakhtin's works also include detailed typologies of discourses, classified according to their structure and construction. According to Michael Holquist, Bakhtin is a system-builder, but not in the sense of methodological closure. Rather, his system consists of open-ended connections, and refuses to view issues in isolation. (Robinson, 2011: no pagination).

This open-endedness was precisely why Bakhtin's input was important to this study; as while Foucault was helpful at unearthing problems he does not, often, offer an alternative whereas Bakhtin's open-ended view offers never-ending possibilities.



Of significance, Bakhtin did not perceive himself as concerned with power. Indeed, he remained silent in regards to power. It is claimed by Iver Neumann that Bakhtin had nothing to say on power for ‘politics and for the social’ (Neumann, 1999: 13). And that Bakhtin is, ‘...a poor social scientist who neglects the empirical study of how dialogues actually proceed, how they interact with other practices, and how they are suffused with power relations’ (Neumann, 2003: 140). However, quite paradoxically, Xavier Guillaume (2011) readily questions the assumption that no, or limited references exist between Bakhtin and power. For instance, Guillaume has shown that in Bakhtin’s work *Rabelais and his World* (Bakhtin, 1984), Bakhtin comprehensively integrates, theoretically, the dynamic power relations between classes during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Guillaume, 2011); what’s more one of the clearest expositions comes from Bakhtin himself when he acknowledges that ‘dialogue is not always the fruit of peaceful existence’ (Wall, 1998: 20). Indeed, whilst it is true that Bakhtin did not write explicitly about power, what will be seen is that for Bakhtin discourse is ‘alive’ but relentlessly at ideological war (Danow, 1991: 29).

As a literary analyst, *dialogue*, that for which Bakhtin (1994) argued so convincingly, could not be reconciled with ‘authoritarian’ forms of speech. The *dialogical world* continually connects with and is informed by other works and voices, in contrast ‘the ‘authoritarian word’ which does not allow any other type of speech to approach it and interfere with it’ (Bakhtin, 1984:x). Bakhtin’s work offered two central concepts to oppose resistance, *heteroglossia* and *carnival*. For the purposes of this thesis only *heteroglossia* is discussed here.

In the *dialogical world*, Bakhtin stressed his analysis of dialogism through the notion of *heteroglossia* (White, 2016). Put simply, *heteroglossia*, suggests that within a single perspective there are always multiple voices and perspectives, because the language which is used has been accessed from others. In *heteroglossia*, Bakhtin expressed criticism to those who viewed language as a closed system. It is here that Bakhtin makes a provocative claim that the notion a unified language would be a vehicle of centralised power (Robinson, 2011: no pagination). He attested that the ‘standard’ language is taken from the speech of the elite. Such an

increase of a specific hegemonic language subdues the heteroglossia of various everyday speech-types. He argued that every day speech is directed to conform to the authorised style so as to be recognised as part of a privileged, closed-off speech-community. This image painted by Bakhtin provoked, and deepened, my understandings of the educational contexts of this study. In both *Lilybank* and the school contexts standard accepted ways of speaking was used, for example when the practitioners / teachers spoke about the curriculum. Here the professionals demonstrated a kind of allegorical consciousness. In this consciousness, words and their meanings had an intimate, fixed relationship. Here, the open expansion of dialogue was seriously inhibited as the language became inaccessible to voices of difference.

However, Bakhtin (1994) did not believe that this monoglossia – so called when the dominating powers in a society attempt to impose one or more discourse on all others, making their discourse and its corresponding meanings the truth in society - could last for long. He believed that monoglossia was destined to be broken by a reoccurrence of *heteroglossia*, as the dominant discourse is interrupted by other voices that emerge from a web of relations. Disparity in power may allow one viewpoint to triumph over the other, but the other always resists and struggles against this authority. ‘Meaning is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener produced via the material of a particular sound complex. It is like an electric spark that occurs when two different terminals hooked together’ (Bakhtin, 1994: 35). Consequently, for Bakhtin language is basically dialogical, a progressive trajectory from one discursive system to another (Bakhtin, 1981). In *heteroglossia*, perspectives, either one’s own or others’ cannot be understood in isolation from one another; as one undergoes ‘becoming’ by choosing to incorporate others’ perspectives (Dentith, 1995).

One example of this is what Bakhtin called ‘double-voicing’ (Baxter, 2014). Double-voicing indicates that when an individual talks, they have increased awareness of the concerns and agendas of others, which is exposed in the ways they change their language in reaction to others. Baxter argues that double-voicing is an inherent and everyday part of the spoken exchanges within educational and

professionals contexts. Double-voicing is directly associated with the ways in which power relations are formed between speakers, as it is often used by less powerful speakers to negotiate perceived threats from more powerful others. This notion of ‘double-voicing’ was helpful in this study in understanding the contexts; as I came to grasp what the practitioners /teachers ‘were saying’ as they discussed the settings in which they worked.

To summarise, this, albeit brief section on Bakhtin, conveys, through *heteroglossia*, how Bakhtin subscribes to an image of resistance and struggle between competing groups using particular language strategies. And, through Bakhtin’s *heteroglossia* it can be understood that language and how it is used is saturated with power. However, Bakhtin consciously distinguishes that where monoglossia exists it does not last for long in *heteroglossia*. It is here that links can be made with Foucault, as both philosophers understood the existence of resistance. I wish to make clear at this juncture, in the true spirit of Bakhtin, I do not offer Bakhtin as a replacement of Foucault rather I have brought them into dialogue with one another. Consequently, I found both philosophers helpful in supporting me to achieve a deeper interpretation of the data.

### **Summary of Chapter Three**

In this chapter I have offered an account of the process by which I conducted the research of this thesis. I began this section with an exploration of my ontological and epistemological position, which underpinned my fieldwork, and through which I understood the ethnographic method used. I theoretically positioned myself within a poststructuralist perspective that interrogates the possibility of objective knowledge. Instead, I have argued, several perspectives and positions are likely as a result of the fact that all action, knowledge and subjectivities are socially and culturally produced.

I have also written about my role as a researcher and how my role was informed by my philosophical orientation. Admittedly, being an insider carrying out intimate, social qualitative research, I was inadvertently challenged at times, finding myself susceptible to biases and suppositions. Fieldwork can be messy – assumptions,

values, beliefs and emotional connections with the participants (as in my case) can all impact on the quality of the data collected.

However, being both reflective and reflexive supported my position of being radically conscious; an awareness which enabled me to constantly question preconceptions, assumptions and any prejudices that may have influenced the data gathering process. I believe that reflexivity from the outset helped sensitise me to my prejudices and subjectivities and consider the ethical approach, which was essential when carrying out fieldwork with children.

I have also sought to thoroughly investigate the dynamics and effects between professionals, children and their parents during one of the most crucial stages of child development, transition from the early years setting to the primary school and to answer my key research questions:

1. *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?*
2. *Are professional approaches to transition flexible or rigid?*
3. *How do children navigate the complexity of transition?*
4. *How fluid are the power relations in transition?*
5. *What happens when children arrive at school?*
6. *What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition and change?*
7. *How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?*

Furthermore, dissemination of the research findings has been an ongoing process, where the development of a set of recommendations on how transition could be improved has emerged. This thesis will be shared with children and their parents and disseminated within my local authority – and other local authorities through training events and seminars – in order to promote greater understanding and contribute to processes of policy development, planning and change. I have already shared my findings with the British Association of Early Childhood Education (Edinburgh and Aberdeen branches), POET – Pedagogies of Educational Transitions (Glasgow, Scotland and Albury, Australia), Nursery World (London) and UPSTART (UK-wide). At the time of writing I have had three papers accepted: one for the European

Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) annual conference, Dublin, August 2016; the International RECE Conference, November 2016, Wairakei Resort, Taupo, New Zealand and one for the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, (NZARE) Conference, 2016, in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

I ended this section by exploring two philosophers and why they were located in the methodological section. First of all, I focussed, at some length, on Foucault's work on power. Through Foucault I began to understand how power influences the transition process, e.g., by making transition an object of inquiry / dehumanising the process as adults discuss the process often by excluding the child; I also found Bakhtin's *heteroglossia* deepened my understanding insofar about what occurs in discourse, that it is often not simply a personal narrative, but that what is 'said' is from many other narratives – and in the educational context this may come from others who are perceived more powerful. However, and of relevance to this thesis, *heteroglossia* allows for children and adults to demonstrate their resistive capacities, and subsequently resist the monoglossia. This was of value, as indicated, where Foucault unearth the issues with power Bakhtin found solutions. Thus, both philosophers were critical to the analysis of this work and both supported my argument for reconceptualist approaches to the way transition is interpreted as well as en-acted.

Having set out my field of interest (Chapter Two), and my methods, the following chapter will discuss the data gathered.

## **Chapter Four: Structures, choices, uncertainties and clash of concepts in transitions**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I explored ethnography as an appropriate means of looking at my research questions. I considered that the methods of ethnography, such as participant observation, would best represent the breadth and depth of children's perspectives, not only verbal, but also gestural (Bakhtin, 1968, 1981, 1990, 1993).

The literature review raised seven questions, two of which will be answered in this chapter:

*1. Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?*

*2. Are professional approaches to transition flexible?*

As this title suggests, this chapter is about the persistent structures, choices and uncertainties that surround transition processes. In Chapter One (1:3), I emphasised that early years settings (despite not being part of compulsory education) were influenced by the educational and highly political context (Peters, 2012). This section begins by revisiting that discussion. I start by highlighting some of the complexities of education. What will be illustrated here is that policy and its interpretation – or misinterpretation – greatly affects children's transition experiences. I wrote that Scottish politicians are focused on transition and that any discussions or discourses about transition must be understood within the educational and political context of the time. Throughout I have shown that each child (and their parents) uniquely connects to the world through all the events which happen to them, including authoritative discourses.

I briefly argue that the choices available to children and parents may not be considered *real* in any meaningful way. Decisions about when children go to school are not always easy to make as each child (and family) experiences a unique lived event. I have added that how parents feel about their child going to school has a great impact on the experience of transition (McIntyre et al., 2007; Giallo et al., 2008; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011; Bradshaw, 2012). I have discussed the challenges of

professional accountability (White, 2016). All the way through, I have shared children's and adults' views on transition. Most importantly, I have suggested that by including children (and their parents) in policy construction, education may be a more socially just space (Dolan, 2012). In a later discussion I share knowledge of an alternative approach to transition. Lastly, although I have touched on *power* throughout, I end with *power* being a central concept to transition.

#### 4.1 Policy

In the world of education, it is widely accepted that what happens day to day in the various sectors is informed by policy (Elmore, 2004; Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Dunlop, 2007). As Peters (2012) puts forward, 'Education, philosophy and politics are all interconnected; they are at the heart of Western tradition in its pursuit of the good life' (Peters, 2012:1). Policy and its interpretation by professionals consequently affect the lives of children and their families. In the following example, a parent explains her son Peter's experience of the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) and how its interpretation has had an impact on his school life:

*From the very beginning of P1, when adults have asked him about school, he has said he doesn't like it. He can do all that is asked of him, but he doesn't enjoy it. Days he likes are those with PE, Golden Time (when you choose what you get to do), and half-day Fridays. We think his current upset was triggered by a part-time teacher who has created an atmosphere of threat and anxiety in the classroom as a classroom management technique and this has been a tipping point for his existing dislike of school. Our son, who is curious and interested in the world and loves reading, will make comments like: 'I don't like learning.' He is currently crying daily in protest at having to go.*

*We hope, working with the school, we'll be able to help him over this, but I feel as if we are helping him cope with a system that is not working in his or other children's interests. His protests are legitimate. We really believe this could be different if schools were to respond to children's interests and support them in their own discoveries and learning to go at their pace. Our son doesn't like writing and I wonder if this is because he has very little choice about what to write about from the outset but, as with everyone in the class, he has to do the same kind of thing. He does 'literacy', but doesn't get to tell stories. There are so many frustrations with hot*

*stuffy Victorian classrooms and timetables, set amidst bare concrete playgrounds. And it feels a very long way from the intentions of the Curriculum for Excellence and the freedom and respect he experienced through the outdoor play until he was four at nursery (Parent comment, May, 2016 – Northfield School).*

What Peter's mother has highlighted is the polarised position of the policy-makers and those who implement the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) and, fundamentally, the social reality of the child. As discussed in Chapter 1 (1.3), an objective of the Scottish Government (2007) was to *actively listen* to children – according to Peter this has yet to be achieved. Power is exercised over Peter by excluding alternative ways of understanding (Foucault, 1977). I will discuss how power is exercised in more detail in the following chapters, but it was worthy of pointing out here.

Also mentioned in Chapter One (1:3) was the intention of the Scottish Government that *learning* at the early level should be *active* (Scottish Government, 2007). However, the above example makes visible the institutionalisation of learning, where very little listening or active learning appears to exist. Peter, for the most part, was being judged in relation to cognitive knowledge. For example, Peter's experience of school was that of the teacher sharing rational knowledge with a predetermined destination in mind. He does not believe that he has any choice and his interests are being ignored. This way of teaching suggests that there is only one way of knowing, a concept rejected by White (2016). Buzzelli (1996) claimed that control over classroom discourse patterns between children and teachers influences what is learned and how children come to view and understand learning. It is argued that this type of teaching, where knowledge is transmitted from adult to child, does not benefit children (Claxton, 2008; Moss, 2014).

In agreement, Friere (1998), critiquing the transmission model, says: 'Teaching is not about depositing packages in the vacant consciousness of the learner (Freire, 1998:5). Furthermore, Farquhar and White, (2014) pose the question 'Whose knowledge counts?' Foucault (1977) also encourages us to ask 'Whose knowledge is represented?' From Peter's example, the knowledge he could have brought into the classroom was not, in his opinion, valued as important.

However, in line with poststructuralist thinking, Peter and his mother can only speak from their own position and it must be considered that perspectives may differ,



substantially, based on subjectivities. It is here Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia* can be helpful (Bakhtin, 1994). One cannot ignore that our subjectivities are influenced by many factors (Holquist, 1990). Based on his own interests, Peter's experience may be very different from the teachers' (and other pupils') perspective of the same experience (White, 2016).

In spite of this, Peter's mother made an important distinction. In her view, the aims of the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) differ markedly from the practice which the architects intended. Peter's mother viewed the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) holistically, a view that ascribed both relationships and context as critical to the learning process; as opposed to a technicist perspective (Moss, 2014). From my fieldwork I learned that what was considered *active* learning (or free-flow play) in *Lilybank* differed greatly from the technicist interventions in the classroom (Moss, 2014; White & Farquhar, 2014).

For example, one day I was informed by the teacher: '*This is when we do our nursery work*' (*Field notes, October 2012*). What was taking place was an activity where the teacher had instructed the children to paint a cut-out drawing of Jack and the Beanstalk. This implied that the teacher may not have known what actually happens in some early years settings – she did not seem to realise that this structured curriculum left no room for children's initiatives. This contrasted greatly with the child-led experiences observed at *Lilybank*, which fostered agentic, active, participating children.

Research question number one asks - *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?* - Peter's mother provided a convincing argument that she understood how policy and practice should be connected, although she thought the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) was being misinterpreted. She also queried what was perceived to be the purpose of education. Peter's mother called for education to be more transparent and responsive to children's interests. It could be concluded that interpretation – or misinterpretation – of policy by educationalists has contributed to the transition to school being challenging, complex and multifaceted for Peter (Woodhead & Moss, 2007; Einarsdottir 2007; Johansson 2002; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002, Margetts, 2000). Peter's mother looked with fresh eyes at how the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) could be

implemented. It is this way of ‘seeing’ that may be useful to policy makers and those who implement it. Recently, a national review, namely *[The] Independent Review of the Scottish Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Workforce and Out of School Care (OSC) Workforce* recommended that policy makers must listen to children and their parents if progress is to be made (Siraj & Kingston, 2015)

Critically, the political and ethical choices involved in policy construction, and the values which permeate the process, often take place in spaces not connected to children, such as office blocks (MacNaughton, Hughes & Smith, 2007; Eke, Butcher & Lee, 2009). Professor Pat Dolan, the prestigious UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement, argues for policy-makers and decision-makers to ‘put the best interests of the child in every decision affecting them’ (Dolan, 2012: 4).

My impression was that no one, apart from his parents, listened to Peter about his transition experience. There may be many other children like him. From the example above, there is a sense that it is Peter who needs to be transformed, rather than any changes made to policy construction. Shields (2011) attests that ‘rules and policies reflect power relations that, when inequitable, contribute to the continual marginalisation or exclusion of minoritised [children]’ (Shields, 2011:230). One parent, who came to Scotland from Italy, met with policy makers to try to change a decision that had been made with regards to her son’s school placement, she explained:

*I had a very different idea of how things work. So it took me a while to really understand what needed to be done. I was very surprised about how technically and rigidly the request for retention [a request for the child not to go to school that academic year] is handled. I don’t feel my concern as is mother, was truly heard. I don’t feel this is because of a lack of empathy or care, but just because it is simply not how it is done...something felt a little funny knowing I was in a room with strangers who had never met my son, talking about his emotional needs being aware the very strict parameters are already decided. It must be very hard to fit every situation and every child into rules, but I can’t believe this way of seeing children and their needs is the right way. I thought we were working together for my son’s best interests but I believe they were representing a system while I was representing my child (Parent comment, July 2016 - Lilybank).*

At issue is that formed policy greatly impacts on the experiences lived by stakeholders (Woodhead, 2006), yet there is no recognition that children and parents could contribute (Dockett & Perry, 1999). The parent above thought she was invited to attend a meeting to discuss her son, but she got the impression the decision was already made before she entered the room. A room full of strangers. White (2016) argues:

Lively debates could take place between policies and the people who make them, live them and are impacted by them, giving primacy to responses and their interpretations rather than demanding allegiance. This includes children, who have much to contribute if we are prepared to linger in their presence (White, 2016: 159).

Echoing a similar sentiment, Prout and Hallett (2003) stressed that ‘children’s voices should, we believe, be heard much more strongly in the process of policy formation’ (Prout & Hallett, 2003:1). Bakhtin (1986; 1993) also makes the point that insights are gained only through social encounters. However, as in the example above, it may be that not all policy makers/implementers are ready to invite children (nor their parents) as co-contributors. As one parent informed me:

*‘The head teacher said to me today, ‘The children from Lilybank are so vocal’. I responded, ‘That’s a good thing isn’t it?’, but I didn’t get the impression it was’ (Parent communication, July, 2015 – Eastfield School).*

Peters (2012) reminds us: ‘Education, philosophy and policy are all interconnected; they are at the heart of Western tradition in its pursuit of a good life’ (Peters, 2012:1). It has been argued here that the lived lives of children and their families were greatly affected by policy. This is why it is pertinent to include the perspectives of all stakeholders in transition processes and policy formation (Lester & Russel, 2008). As I will argue in the later sections of this chapter, rather than enculturation into an existing world, it is time to view children and their parents as co-contributors within their social community. Policy makers, and those who implement policy, have much to learn from children’s lived experiences. The result may be that educational spaces become more socially just, as children’s views are

respected, valued and acted upon. As I will elaborate further, the views of children and parents are not always included in transition processes.

#### 4.1.1 Traditional and current influences

Traditionally, children transitioning to primary school were more likely to have done so from their family home with their parents, primarily the mother figure, having overall responsibility for the process. However, a recent study carried out in Scotland found that 98 per cent of children were registered with an early years provider (Scottish Government, 2013).

Consequently, the school transition process is likely to take place from an early years setting (Groark et al., 2002). It is suggested by Gill et al. (2006) that this change is due to several societal factors, for example, a ‘decline of informal support systems, the rise of nuclear and single-parent families, and economic needs necessitating both parents or single parents to join the workforce’ (Gill et al., 2006:213). This has resulted in significant changes to transition.

The onus of an effective transition is often left with early years settings. The shift in responsibility provides an opportunity for the voices of children and parents to be heard. As I discovered, children and parents regularly revealed their thoughts – both aspirational and points of contention – about the transition to school. The following example illustrates the concerns of one parent:

*My main anxiety as Cloud-Ace starts school is assessment and streaming of children at this early stage. My specific concern is that he will be limited and/or negatively influenced as a result. While he has picked up some numeracy and literacy skills over the past few years, they certainly haven't been the focus of his activities. Cloud-Ace was a more timid toddler compared to the busy five-year-old he is now. He has come a little later than some of his peers to running everywhere, climbing whatever presents itself, and generally exploring his physical capabilities. It seems reasonable and desirable that he should have the freedom to do this, following his own natural learning curve where such fundamental development is concerned. I'm concerned that he will pick up on any 'streaming' of the children according to an assessment of their abilities. He is building up an image of himself all the time, taking in and incorporating feedback from the people around him. I certainly*

wouldn't want to hand a judgment on his abilities at this stage myself, and I would not be able to convince myself that there is little impact.

*Of even more concern to me is the possibility that such an early assessment would limit the experiences he has at school. Will he have a different workbook to others? Would this mean he would encounter smaller challenges? Will his possible achievements be artificially limited? If he finds he meets the challenges set, is there a mechanism that has to click in to allow further challenges to be presented? Will he have to complete tasks with one arm tied behind his back while spinning plates in order to convince a teacher that he is worthy of being 'allowed' a greater challenge? I'm actually furious and quite frightened that his options could be reduced as such an early stage.*

*Can such imposed limitations be justified? Even the most sensitive and responsive teacher would find it impossible for there to be a faultless transition between artificially created 'streams'. An effort is required on the part of the child in this scenario, perhaps after the knockback of being overtly categorised as incapable of achievements, to change streams. Boundaries would have to be pushed at – he would have to jump out of one furrow and into another. I understand that there is evidence that those children who start behind never catch up. It seems to me that the systems in place likely contribute to this phenomenon, by creating barriers to the children's educational experiences based on early assessment and grading (Parent communication, May 2012- Lilybank).*

The *Lilybank* team regularly responded to concerns from parents about their children going to school. These were manifested in different forms – sometimes they were similar to Cloud-Ace's mother, who was very concerned about assessment and how it was becoming a *normalised* part of the child's transition to school (Foucault, 1980). Assessing children emerges from neoliberal and market-driven government policies that originate from capitalist thinking (e.g., *The Collaborative*, 2014; Scottish Government, 2015). The neoliberal context (referred to in Chapter One) has a great impact on current trends in education processes.

For example, Cloud-Ace's mother shared her concerns that knowledge would be transmitted from the knowledgeable teacher to the less knowledgeable child (Gilbert, 2005; Wegerif, 2006). The neoliberal context promotes an image of children as human capital in a global and competitive economy (Apple, 2006); this vision of children results in their school performance being standardised for a future world (Nuthall, 2007). For this reason, Apple suggests schools are a 'vast supermarket'

(Apple, 2006:10). This view denies children the opportunity to change the world or go beyond themselves (Davis & Watson, 2002; Moss, 2008; 2014) and learning is predefined for a future we know very little about. Children are expected to fit, and if they do not achieve all that is expected, they will be left behind (James, 2002). This predefined curriculum concerned Cloud-Ace's mother.

In answer to the first question - *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?* - Cloud-Ace's mother connected theory, policy and practice as she illustrated her knowledge about her son being socialised into an existing society, and that the current curriculum was being interpreted as based on universal scientific truths and technicist approaches to education (Moss, 2008; 2014). Further Cloud-Ace's mother illustrated knowledge that if her son 'failed', there would be technicist strategies to help him overcome his *difficulties*. She strongly disagreed with this and referred to research that suggested this was a narrow view of education which did not suit all children. Observations from Davis and Watson (2002) would agree this model falls short of providing educational opportunities for all children. Davis & Watson (2002) claim a curriculum based on science, commodification and bureaucracy ignores the richness of children – they resoundingly endorse a curriculum that responds to *all* children. The idea of disrupting the fixed order appeals to me – in my view we need a curriculum that is flexible and responsive to all children.

Cloud-Ace's mother was not alone – similar concerns from other parents were shared regularly with the *Lilybank* team. Central to my study was that the transition process was viewed, not as an isolated experience, but rather as a community experience, establishing relationships and connecting the people around the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Ungar, 2002; Rogoff, 2003; Corsaro & Molinari, 2005; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry et al., 2000; Peters, 2010; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Griebel & Niesel, 2013).

Listening to the children and parents about their concerns and aspirations was viewed as an important part of the transition process and had great relevance to this study. Critically, it is argued that 'the childcare and education setting...cannot succeed adequately in preparing children for school entry in isolation from home' (Gill et al., 2006:215, also Petrie et al., 2000). With this in mind, a range of

perspectives from children, parents and practitioners were explored and analysed (Margetts, 2009; Dockett & Perry, 2009).

The Scottish Government is now firmly focused on transition (*Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010*). It is now commonly accepted that the transition from early years to school is recognised as a vital and ‘dynamic’ period in children’s lives (Einarsdottir, 2010). This finding is consistent with the literature review explored in this study. For example, Gill et al., (2006) said that ‘for all children, the transition to formal schooling is a noteworthy milestone with far-reaching consequences. It initiates a critical period of adjustment in children’s lives’ (Gill et al., 2006:213; also MacNaughton, 2002; Sayers *et al*, 2012).

A research finding by Kitson (2004) also points toward this critical period: ‘Starting school is one of the universal experiences of childhood and marks a significant change in a child’s life’ (Kitson, 2004:236). Others convey the idea that it is a ‘big deal’ (Yeboah, 2002; Fabian, 2007; Margetts, 2009; Moska, 2010) and a ‘landmark event’ (Kagan, 1999; Pianta & Cox, 2002). There is a wealth of research which informs interested individuals of the importance of this particular period. It not only affects the child at the point of transition, it has lasting consequences.

The literature exposed diverse views among scholars who questioned an image of the developing child ‘fitting into school systems’ (e.g. Rogoff, 2003; Burr, 2003; Burman, 2008). This view is in contrast with the child as a knowledgeable, strong, and powerful member of society (Einarsdottir, 2007a). The view of the developing child is derived from Western normative models that shape assumptions about what children can and cannot do at certain stages (Baker, 1998; Freeman, 1998; Dowling, 1995; Mayall, 2001; Smith, 2002). These assumptions result in a clash of concepts and rigid working practices as adults plan transition processes based on a philosophical view that underestimates the capabilities of the child. And parents are aware of this clash and encounter difficulties when their views of childcare and education do not fit with systems of transition:

*I can’t see the hurry or need to stress him and force him into primary school when he is not ready. I believe children want to learn and they do when they are ready. I want him to enjoy school and although transitions can be hard for everyone, like many things that are part of life, it has to be a positive experience over all (Parent communication, July 2016- Lilybank).*

Overall the section above has provided, in part, a negative answer to my second research question – *Are professional approaches to transition flexible?* The next section considers this question and discusses this question in relation to rigid notions of age.

## 4.2 Scope for flexibility

One recurring theme in my research was that of the age *when* children start school. The average school starting age in Scotland is five, the age which children, parents and professionals refer to when they speak about starting school. In reality, taking into account children's birthdays and term times, children in Scotland begin school anywhere between the ages of 4.5 and 5.5 years. This difference of one year can be very significant to children's social relationships (Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Taylor, 2005). As will be discussed in later sections of the chapter, children utilise adult age and stage discourses when discussing their socio-cultural lived experiences of transition (e.g. whether they have a birthday in one location or the other during the course of the year).

Ongoing developments in the Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) have added to the renewed interest in transition. As discussed in Chapter One (1:3), the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) is about a continuum of education for children aged three to 18 years. The conventional notion that learning begins in school is no longer held by the Scottish Government. It is now acknowledged that learning which takes place in early years settings has a significant impact on the child (Sylva et al., 2004; Stephen, 2006).

The child's age has become a fundamental factor in the *Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) which provides a continuous curriculum between early years settings and schools. Policy-makers/implementers now argue that children are receiving a similar service in early years and school settings (Sweet 2015). However, from Peter's example, his interests from *Lilybank* were ignored when he transitioned to school which suggests that Sweets' view is at best complacent and at worst flawed. Peter's example suggests, in keeping with research on inclusive



pedagogy, that rigid school based approaches to learning do not suit all children (Davis & Watson, 2002). Sweet's position ignores that children who share the same experience at the same time have different lived moments of exchange (White, 2016).

Similarly Thomas the Tank Engine did not want to go to the local primary, simply because he was of 'school age'. During a pre-transition visit before starting, Thomas the Tank Engine expressed his deep dissatisfaction about going to school:

*Our son told us, when we informed him that he had been accepted in [name of] primary school, that he wasn't ready. We decided to have a discussion about it and when we queried further as to his reasons he said he enjoyed being by himself. He felt that he was starting to make friends at Lilybank and he would like to 'just be'. He would like to play and felt that, and I quote, 'he would get frustrated if he didn't'. He felt that playing brought him joy, he feels that he is shy...he also felt that right now, he was a kid. He was only four. He was too young to go to school... (Extract from a parent interview, April 2015 - Lilybank).*

After a discussion with her family, the mother withdrew the school application. The only choice the child and family had, if they did not send him to school, was to send him to an unfamiliar private early years setting (because of deferral and funding policy/procedures), which is no real choice. It appeared that, after a discussion with the council, no other driving force other than age dictated that he had to leave *Lilybank*. This suggested a top-down approach which is in contrast to what a 'continuum' curriculum actually means.

The next stage for this parent was confirmation from the assessment panel who stated:

*...The panel was of the view that there was not the evidence that Thomas the Tank Engine required a further year at nursery and that his needs should be planned for in a Primary One setting, with good transition planned. (Letter of correspondence to parent, April 2015).*

Interestingly, the parent was informed that a 'good transition' should be planned. However, at no time was it explained to the parent exactly what a 'good transition'

would consist of. The letter included an acknowledgement of a parents' right not to send their child to school at this time, because of his age:

*...You are, however, not obliged to take up a Primary One place in August 2015 as Thomas the Tank Engine is not of compulsory school age until August 2016. Please note, however, he would not be eligible to receive an additional year's free early learning and childcare at a local authority nursery or funding in a partner provider nursery. You can, of course, take up a place at a private nursery for that time however you would be responsible for meeting the full cost of this... (Extract from council response to parent, May 2015).*

The concept of age, therefore, is seen as fundamental to the issue of transition (Kagan, 1990; Crinic & Lamberty, 1994; Dowling, 1995; Dockett & Perry, 2002; Mawdsley, Thomson & Payne, 2013). If Thomas the Tank Engine had been born 34 days later his parents would not have had to battle with the council.

The focus on age presupposes a somewhat outdated perspective of the naturally unfolding view of maturation rather than an awareness of the individual differences in children. The past 30 years have seen increasingly rapid advances in the field of sociological and anthropological studies that argue children are not just developing adults or adults to be, but people in their own right (Jenks, 1982; Prout, 1990; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Archard, 1993; Clarke, 2005; Lee, 2013).

Frequently, when discussing young children's transitions, standard comments are made about the age of children, their maturity and physical stature, such as: Is the child too young or old enough to start school? When would be the best age to start? Will their small stature affect their success? All these statements refute the diversity of children, expecting all children to reach the same level in the same domains at a particular age, which classifies children in accordance with the standardised model of the child (Jenks, 2005; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006). As White (2016) argues, 'as societies become more and more diverse and complex any notion of the universal child is seriously disrupted' (White, 2016:154).

It is argued that effective, positive transitions recognise, respect and respond to the diversity of individual children (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005). Age is a primary factor which needs analysis and investigation before any

discussion on transition can be made. The concept is then fundamental to transition, transition policy, transition processes and, subsequently, choice of *when* children start school.

#### 4.2.1 Barriers and potentialities of becoming school age

In Scotland, children are eligible to start school during the August closest to the child's fifth birthday, with the cut-off dates for entry from the end of February in one year to the beginning of March the next. With a statutory school age thus ranging from four years and seven months to five years and five months, school children in Scotland are amongst the youngest in Europe. The differences in school starting age between Scotland and other countries are highlighted in *Figure 11* below.

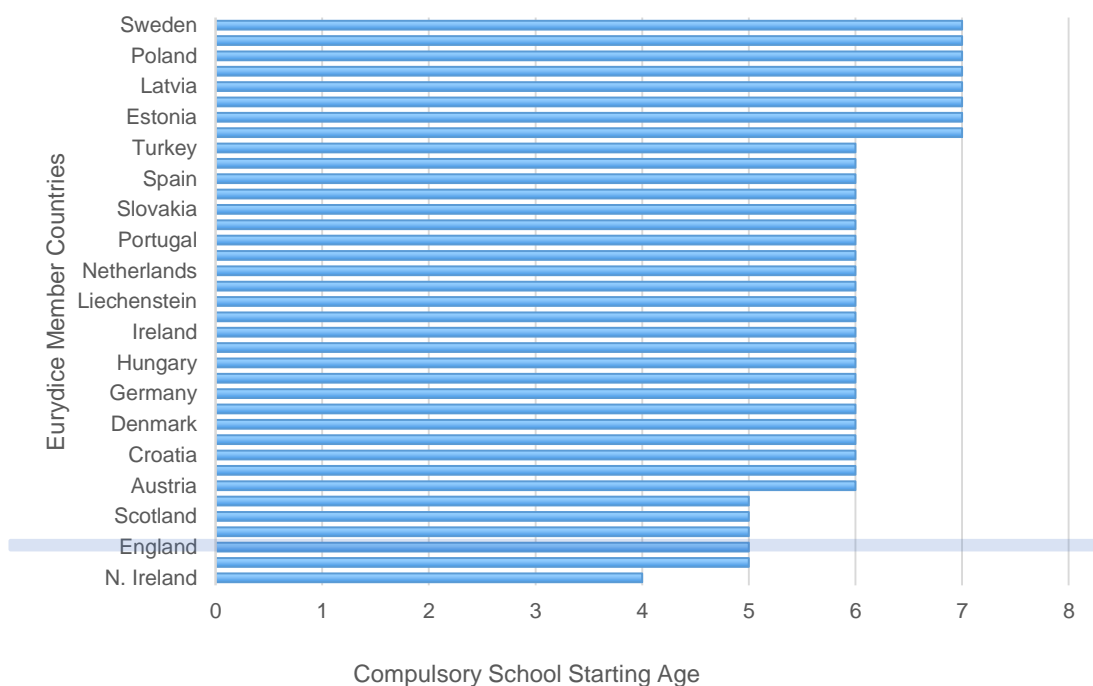


Figure 11: Age of children when they start school

There are two procedures which parents have a right to if they do not wish their child to start school. The first is an *automatic deferral* but the second option, the *discretionary deferral*, is more complex. For an automatic deferral, parents of children with January and February birthdays can apply to have school entry delayed

and a nursery placement is subsequently provided for another year, as summarised below:

*If your child is of school age but has not reached the age by the start of the new school session, usually mid-August, their school place can be delayed until the start of the next school year. However, only children with January and February birthdays are entitled to receive a continued funding place at either a [state nursery] or a partner nursery should their parents request this (Name of Council, 2013:2).*

Interestingly, the data revealed that not all parents welcomed being given this choice. Whether to send their child to school or not reflected the parents' complex understandings of childhood, uniformity of school goals, curricula and principles of organisation. Some parents identified that their child may be 'incomplete' or 'incompetent', while others viewed their child as an active constructor of their own world (Hendrick, 1990; Burman, 1994; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). The following conversation reveals how one set of parents thought it would be difficult to make such a choice:

*The one thing I am glad about is that we didn't have a choice about whether to send Philip to school. With a December birthday there wasn't a choice for us, whereas Lena [name of another parent and friend] had a choice. They chose not to send Ian. And I think that is a very hard decision to make. And it is funny, I have had that discussion with my older sister and she said, 'I would keep them back every time. Did she? What criteria did she use? It would boil down to a feeling. It is really about the person they are...or do they have those core skills yet... sociability, are they able to listen... maturity... can...' I suppose, if there were any of those issues, I don't think we would have an option anyway, but I do feel for the parents who have an option in January and February because I think it is a really hard call to make and you would agonise over it.' (Mother and father in parent interview, August 2013 – Westfield School).*

Philip is the eldest child in his family, so this was the first time his parents had had experience of transition from nursery to school. Although there was no question of deferring Philip's entry, his parents were acutely aware of how difficult it must be

to have to rely only on their perception of how ready their son was for the transition. They were quite clear that, should they have had to take such a decision, they would have considered not only core skills but also Philip's socio-emotional development and interpersonal skills.

Dockett and Perry (2013) argue that much discussion about transition still concentrates on individual children's skills as they start school (also, Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Taylor, 2005), which contrasts with the importance of the characteristics of children and their families (Dockett & Perry, 2009). The parents' perception did not take into account their knowledge of Philip, simply that they were not qualified to make the decision for the child. Thereby, they were unintentionally drawing from developmental psychology theory (e.g. Lewin, 1943; Parson & Bales, 1955; Werner, 1957; Freud, 1962; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Piaget, 1970; Heider, 1971, and others), which informed their decision making. Returning to the question of whether parents connect theory, policy and practice, unintentionally these parents were drawing from traditional strongholds of psychological, developmentalist views that limit the capacity of young children (White, 2016).

Other parents who had a history of early experiences from their family or cultural background chose to send their child to school, although they had the right to an automatic deferral:

*...we made a decision to put him [Cristiano Ronaldo] in young and you just have to cross your fingers and hope that he is ok. And obviously we are pleased and he loves it so... (Parent interview, November 2012 – Westfield School).*

In analysing the approach of these parents, it could be said that they have made a 'leap of faith', trusting that the age-defined approach would ensure that their child's needs would be met (Sweet, 2015). In a later interview, the parents of Cristiano Ronaldo elaborated on their decision:

*But I have to say that is one of the things when Lewis [Cristiano Ronaldo's elder sibling] went to school, 'cos obviously I don't understand how things work in this country, in Finland they go when they are seven years old, so... um... so I wasn't sure, but obviously we had very good relations with [the practitioner at*

*Lilybank] at the time and I felt that reassured me because Lewis was not holding a pencil in his hand whatsoever (laughs)... he would not want to hold a pencil... and [practitioner] always said 'it will be fine, it will come'. He didn't know any letters, he could count some but as a basic knowledge there was really nothing there, but when he went to school he started picking up things right away and I never had one problem with him whatsoever and he... everything he knows he learnt at school... I didn't teach him... he just wasn't interested but from that very first day he came back with paper and a pencil and we thought 'yeah'. And that is why we never worried about Cristiano Ronaldo. He started getting interested in letters, but only responded to what he was wanting... I didn't make him... at school nursery they were sort of making an issue of it saying, 'Well he doesn't know this and he needs to practice that.' I said to the lady, 'Look I have had one in the school before, I know school is for learning and I don't feel they need to know these things before they go... (Parent interview, August 2013 – Westfield School).*

At the outset, Cristiano Ronaldo's parents expressed a lack of certainty about the requirement of 'necessary core skills' (Petriwiskyj, Thorpe & Taylor, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2013). They emphasised that, instead of concentrating on core skills, they valued a sustained involvement with school life. By taking Cristiano Ronaldo with them to school at every opportunity the parents thought this was of more value (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005; Chan, 2010).

While this family initially questioned the rationale for an early school starting age (Woodhead, 1989), coming from a country that starts formal schooling at seven, they drew upon their personal experiences of life to make an informed choice (White, 2016). They were confident that Cristiano Ronaldo would develop the necessary skills when he entered the school environment (Dockett & Perry, 2013).

The parents were more interested in the whole child and less interested in academic preparedness that includes 'tick boxing' the child to gain school entry (Bradshaw et al., 2014). In contrast, the parents took a more comprehensive view which included their child's physical well-being, social and emotional development and, importantly, Cristiano Ronaldo gaining a good general knowledge of the school prior to entry.

Researchers have noted that parents' beliefs play an important role in shaping children's early experiences and that children are likely to

learn those skills that are prized within a culture (Gill *et al.*, 2006: 215).

From this example it can be interpreted that, by having trust in their son's capabilities, Cristiano Ronaldo's parents contributed to his successful start at school (McIntyre *et al.*, 2007; Giallo *et al.*, 2008; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011; Bradshaw, 2012). Interestingly they were willing to subvert their own cultural beliefs and accept the Scottish ways. However, Cristiano Ronaldo's parents view was not shared by all the research participants. Some parents, although uncomfortable about age five starting age, accepted that their child would unavoidably attend school:

*Sometimes I wonder if we should have waited another year for Sweety to start school. I think she was socially prepared for it but it has been a bit of a mental challenge for her. I think there is a big age gap. Sweety is the youngest one in her class. She is doing well but I have got the feeling that she would have enjoyed a bit more of her early years childhood. The primary school environment is very grown up and I think we should protect the nature of childhood at this age, 4, 5 and 6 years (Parent interview, May 2013 – Eastfield School).*

According to this parent, Sweety coped well socially, establishing relationships and interacting with others, which is viewed by transition researchers as critical to smooth transition (Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry *et al.*, 2000; Peters, 2010a; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Griebel & Niesel, 2013). However, cognitively, Sweety has experienced challenges and difficulties and this was of concern to her mother.

Another parent was concerned about her child's literacy and numeracy skills and given the choice, would have delayed his starting age:

*At the time of starting I did not feel my child was ready for school. He enjoyed being outside and chose to do this rather than indoor activities at nursery, so I felt he would struggle with being inside all day. He also showed little interest in learning about letters or numbers. To me [Charlie] felt too young to go to school... (Parent interview, April 2013 - Northfield).*

The parent's main concern centred around her child's lack of interest in narrowly defined academically-orientated domains, she viewed these as necessary core skills for starting school. The perceived lack of skills was then linked to his age. According to Gill et al., (2006) the:

...acquisition of academic skills is a tangible measure of learning...schools have historically pushed academic preparedness, parents, committed to academic success, feel the need to advance the same agenda (Gill, *et al* 2006:222).

The results suggest that we cannot assume that all participants would like the choice to automatically defer their child. Decisions taken about age, core skills and so on involve different things for different people. Some parents expressed, with a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty, concern about how their child's age would impact on their developmental skills (Petriwiskyj, Thorpe & Taylor, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2013).

Parents also took into consideration conventional wisdom which informed their decisions. Even when talking about the same general core skills, different people have diverse understandings and expectations and seek to find distinctive things to inform the choice they make. Despite offering parent participants a choice, there is no doubt that for some parents the choice of making an automatic deferral is a complex one. What we can interpret from the parents' narratives is that their underground dialogues (i.e. dialogues that are typically ignored or shut down) (White, 2015) are not always heard by the people who need to hear them. And a lack of engagement with parents hidden narratives results in professionals failing to produce flexible systems of transition.

#### **4.2.2 The role that age plays in the deferral process**

The current political imperative is to reduce deferral requests. In recent times, fuelled by research (e.g. Gorton, 2012) there have been significant changes to discretionary deferral procedures. Despite the limited nature of Gorton's research, which focused



on specific children with additional needs and drew heavily from American studies, it has greatly impacted on local transition policy and the deferment process.

This may indicate that the drivers of policy may be influenced by fiscal considerations rather than relevant theory and practice. Prior to changes, as a result of Gorton's research, a child whose birthday was in November or December had the right to an automatic deferral. This is no longer the case. Parents whose child's birthday falls between mid-August and December have to apply for their child's place to be delayed through discretionary deferral. Parents are given the following information:

Continued funding for a nursery place for children whose birthday falls between August and December is not an entitlement and it is at the discretion of the child's resident local authority. This is the case when a child has received just one year of pre-school funding. Applications for delayed entry have reduced considerably over the past two years and interestingly most children of this are successfully supported in Primary One (Name of Council, 2013).

Despite this claim, discretionary deferral requests by parents of four-year-olds have markedly risen nationally. This trend is reflected locally (*Figure 12*).

<b>Number of Applicants for P1 deferral in [name of city]</b>		
<i>Total applicants (automatic and discretionary)</i>	2011-12	459
	2010-11	542
<i>Discretionary applications only</i>	2011-12	107
	2010-11	175
<i>Discretionary applications approved</i>	2011-12	42
	2010-11	95
<i>Discretionary rejected</i>	2011-12	65
	2010-11	80

Figure 12: Source: (Small, 2011)

Parents are notified that they can apply for a discretionary deferral. But should it be refused, parents have the choice of paying for another year in a privately-run early years setting without the support of Scottish Government funding, bearing the financial consequences of their decision to defer<sup>1</sup>. As the data from Thomas the Tank Engine illustrated alongside this a parent whose child attended a state early years setting did not have the choice to have another year in the early years setting, and had to uproot them to an unfamiliar early years setting for one year. I concluded that the system prevented flexible choices for children and parents.

In addition to the inflexibility of the system, the criteria for delaying transition was built on a deficit model of childhood that required parents to justify their decision based on the inabilities of their child. For example, any parent who sought to make an application for a discretionary deferral had to write at length about their child's (perceived) shortfalls. This information was then shared with the head of the early years setting, who could make the choice to support or not support the application. The following extract was written by a parent seeking a deferral:

*Peter's lifelong learning and self-esteem would significantly benefit from an additional nursery year. As well as being one of the youngest in his school year group, he is developmentally young for his age. He is a socially shy child who struggles to engage in larger groups. If he feels under stress he is most likely to withdraw. If he goes to school before he is ready and without the skills to manage the complex social environment, we are concerned that this will have a detrimental effect on his sense of confidence, self-esteem and his ability to learn. (Extract from a two-page request for deferral document from a parent - Lilybank).*

The school is a primary context for relationship building; it is part of our profoundly communal world that is shared and co-created with others. It is hardly surprising that relationships emerge as a concern for both children and parents. The key concern for this parent was her son's ability to make relationships, not something that can be measured in academic terms. How children make and sustain relationships appears repeatedly in transitional literature, where researchers stress

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<sup>1</sup>Since April 2002, local authorities have a duty to secure a funded part-time place in an early years setting for every three and four-year-old whose parents wish it.

that they are vital to successful transitioning (Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry et al., 2000a; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Peters, 2003; 2010; Griebel & Niesel, 2013).

Practitioners are consistently informed that ‘parents are the first and ongoing educators of their own children...’ (*SEED*, 2006:4), and that parental engagement has a distinct and broad effect on children’s learning. Parents know their child best. However, the deferral report is viewed, and the decision about the child’s discretionary deferral is made, by adults who have a lesser knowledge of the child.

The policy guidelines *Delaying Your Child’s Entry to Primary School: Advice for Parents and Carers* (2014) advise parents that ‘all requests will be considered by an Assessment Panel, comprising Early Years Managers, an Educational Psychologist and a Head Teacher, and [they] will be informed in writing of their decision.’ (Name of council, 2014:3)

The meetings take place in the local authority headquarters (Rainford, 2014) in a place occupied by adults. Those adults make fundamental life-changing decisions about children’s lives:

*I refer to your application for delayed entry to primary school and write to inform you that the assessment panel are unable to grant Clark Kent an extra year of funded early learning and childcare for the academic session 2015/2016. The panel, comprising of an Early Years Manager and Senior Educational Psychologist carefully considered the reasons put forward by yourself and the information provided by Lilybank. However, they are of the opinion that Clark Kent will be able to be supported within the Early Stage of the Curriculum for Excellence in the Primary One setting. (Extract from council correspondence with a parent, May 2015).*

In 2011, the assessment panel of [name of council] rejected 61 per cent of discretionary deferrals compared with 40 per cent in 2010 (*Figure 12*). As will be seen in the following excerpt from my field notes, all council staff are encouraged not to support deferrals, whether they agree or not with the decision taken. This dichotomy between policy and practice poses challenges for workers, both as a professional being and as someone with personal considerations:

*I met with a council bureaucrat today, Mrs Planner. I could feel the tension in the air as she sat down. My experience of Mrs Planner is that when she is unhappy about something it shows in her overall demeanour. It is tangible, acerbic. This made me apprehensive from the outset and although we were sitting in my office, an environment I normally feel very comfortable in, I had a feeling that this was not going to be pleasant. My past experiences with Mrs Planner have not always been congenial... (Field notes, May 2015 - Lilybank).*

Early years settings are monitored by official bodies that play an important role in determining what takes place within them. Being at the mercy of external factors can be challenging. According to the head, Mrs Planner's visit was no chance encounter. Something was wrong. White (2016) argues when the 'balance between intimate engagement and external, perhaps impartial, accountability shifts too much in one direction or the other, [the meeting] turns into a form of submission or manipulation' (White, 2016:23). As the head teacher feared was the case:

*Mrs Planner informed me she needed to talk to me about two deferral forms I had signed. I acknowledged I signed them and proceeded to provide some professional background information on why. I considered (inwardly) that council policy may not have been followed as it would have been very unlikely to convene an assessment meeting for one child, as per council timeframes, from the submission of the deferral form to the administration department on a Thursday afternoon to the decision being made on a Friday morning.*

*Mrs Planner explained, somewhat officially, that the request for deferrals would not be granted as there was an expectation that the children's needs would be supported in school. Mrs Planner explained that the parents had not provided the information needed to meet the criteria. I noted I had no knowledge of what the criteria were and it was unlikely that the parents would have. Mrs Planner informed me I would have the information for next year, but there would be an expectation in the future that I would not support the deferrals from parents unless the children had designated Additional Support for Learning Needs. I was torn between fighting for the child and parents. I was being forced not to consider the child or their family, but to prioritise council procedure above all else (Field notes, May 2015 - Lilybank).*

In this example, quite clearly, the bureaucrats' voice was privileged over the child, the parents and professionals. Somewhere in this process resides the child's ignored identity and perspective. Parents do have the right to appeal the decision made by the council. One parent who did appeal explained her experience:

*My deferral request was denied for technical and impersonal reasons in the end his age was stronger than my concern for his emotional well-being. I can't find a nicer way to describe what happened because even though I read their reasons I can't understand why they chose what they do choose to make such decisions. I appealed, in the rejection papers it was clearly written it was my right to appeal, but clearly not to have my voice heard and considered outside the strict parameters...How can one parent talking with her heart stand against that? [the education committee – all strangers to the parent] not because I felt against them, but they seemed to have been against me. I had the impression they struggled to even look at me. I left the meeting with the understanding that the power they had given me with the right to appeal came with the deception of knowing I had been a guest in their territory, where only their rules had weight. (Parent communication, July 2016- Lilybank).*

The parent explained that she initially believed this meeting was an opportunity to be heard, but she believed that almost as soon as she had entered the arena she knew the decision had been made. The parent was informed should she wish to take things further, (i.e., if she disagreed with the outcome) she would need to employ the services of a legal representative. The parent was not in a position to finance a legal representative, therefore the council found themselves in an advantageous position over this mother.

This systems rigidity results in parents applications being rejected because they lack the necessary information, or because they do not have the finances to meet the legal costs. Overall, according to the parents in this study, there is a lack of clarity for parents. This lack of clarity enables the decision-makers to make the rules up as they see fit, rather than there being openness, transparency and collaboration (Davis, 2011).

Such experiences of inconsistent rule-making were not isolated, and reached other aspects of educational practices, as one of the study parents informed me:

*...I had a very frank discussion with the teacher last week. When I asked why she didn't say anything about the behaviours of teachers and the use of punitive measures, she told me if she did she wouldn't get a job in [name of council] again. There isn't a culture of openness, feedback, open mind-set and collaboration, it is not the culture to ask children and parents for feedback and then share it with everyone. It is about getting it right and if not, blaming someone else. It is not a culture of making mistakes and speaking up...until we have transparency and measurements it is very difficult to identify the gaps, improve practice and celebrate success. There is such inconsistency across schools and within schools it is no wonder children get confused (Parent interview, December 2014 – Eastfield School).*

These examples of unclear processes and practices are important as they involve no attempt by decision-makers to listen to the views of participants and, consequently, no intention to develop a culture of participation (Davis et al., 2014). White (2016) contends that in situations where early childhood managers 'operate on a principle of low trust or exert a great deal of pressure on [professionals] based on external accountabilities, [professionals] can become discursively 'obedient' ' (White, 2016:154). Through subtle and insidious forms of power, there was an expectation that council employees complied with existing cultures.

White (2016) adds: '[Professionals] are highly accountable to authorities. They must also bear allegiance to the profession itself – characterised by codes of practice, curriculum and regulation' (White, 2016:154). The above data examples alerts us to the monologic potential and authoritative discourses that are 'constantly present in organisations of social and governmental life' (Bakhtin, 1981:99).

Additionally, Woodhead (2006) offers a cautionary note that policy-makers have an intermittent practice of selecting theory for the purpose of fitting their broader economic political agenda. This could be linked to the [name of council] deferment process. For example, [name of council] took into account the research by Gorton (2012) when it suited current policy and procedures. Gorton claimed that children's initial upset at starting school would be resolved in time and professionals in the council used this short time research project to justify long term decisions. This led the deferral process to homogenise children and fail to take of account the diverse requirements of children and their families. Woodhead (2006) and Ungar (2002)

argue that those in power have ignored children and parents seeking holism, through unity and sameness rather than unity in diversity:

Critics of homogenising professional discourse argue...that those who represent the state through its social services pay too little attention to the subjugation of [children and parents]... and the communities they 'serve' (Unger, 2002: 485).

I would argue that subjugation extends to children and parents – and also to those doing the serving.

The data in this section demonstrates the lack of flexibility in transition processes, illustrates how local councils inhibit real choice for children and parents and establishes that policies are written and procedures followed without any meaningful consultation with the very people most affected (MacNaughton, Hughes & Smith, 2007; Eke, Butcher & Lee, 2009). It has been shown that the assessment panel members who make the decision on discretionary deferrals have little or no knowledge about the child. The age of the child and the power invested in numerical demarcation is central to all aspects of the process and underpins the rigidity of the system.

#### **4.2.3 Children's diverse perspectives on age and choice**

Discussions with children and parents highlighted and reinforced the notion that age is a central factor when discussing transitions. Notably, though, children and parents talk about age differently. Based on children's accounts, it became clear that when they talk about age, there is an acceptance that they will go to school on or around their fifth birthday. Some children said that they expected to be at nursery until they reached five years old and are notably disappointed at not being there. This was the case with Ninja Rock, who in November, having attended school for three months, wanted to return to nursery to celebrate an important occasion, his fifth birthday:

*'I am thinking to have my birthday party at the nursery. I'll be five that is why I wanted to stay at nursery' (Child interview, November 2012).*

For Ninja Rock, to mark his birthday at nursery would have been his *rite of passage* (Vizedom & Caffè, 2010), celebrating the transition from one phase of life to another. Not celebrating his birthday at *Lilybank* meant that this was lost. However, for some children transition from nursery to school is, in itself, their rite of passage. Although some children may miss having their birthday celebrated at *Lilybank*, for others the transition to school is a very positive experience. All children do not necessarily see the transition to school as negative (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Returning to the key question regarding the lack of flexibility in transition processes, for some children structures in transition such as starting school at a particular age are a reassurance.

However, this birthday was an important marker for Ninja Rock. In his final year at nursery, many of his peers would also have had a fifth birthday ceremony. A fuss is made of birthday celebrations at *Lilybank* and they are ritually enacted in a variety of ways, ensuring the whole community is made aware of the special day. The child bakes a cake with their friends and this is then shared with everyone after a celebratory song. Ninja Rock associated his fifth birthday ceremony with his rite of passage from one domain to another. This illustrates that children are ‘directly or indirectly influenced by the ideologies that exist in the setting, even though adults are not aware of this’ (White, 2016: 154).

Not all the children shared Ninja Rock’s plight. Others easily accepted that they would move to school:

*‘Guess how old I am!’ Superman asked excitedly. Superman looked at me smiling, hardly able to contain the answer. I have a puzzled look as if I don’t know or can’t guess; all the while knowing she had a big birthday party at the weekend. A small hand appears from behind her back holding five fingers widespread. ‘Five,’ I answer. Superman squeals with delight. ‘When did that happen?’ I ask. ‘I am five now, I had my birthday [party]’. The birthday party signifies this is indeed so. ‘I am going to school soon. I am going to the same school as my sister.’ I smile and agree with Superman as she stands there in her sister’s hand-me-down school uniform, a grey pinafore and white short sleeved blouse, clearly delighted at bringing me this exciting news (Lilybank field notes, May 2012).*



Here Superman prepares for school and begins to leave behind the previous phase of her life. She looks forward to exploring the new space (Moska, 2010). Her status is changing although she has not yet assumed her new identity of being a school child. She has already begun to display identification with her soon-to-be school by wearing the (borrowed) school uniform. This opportunity to dress up offers a unique opportunity for Superman to develop and exercise her agency, identity and voice. Reaching school age is evidently worthy of celebration to Superman. Going to school is already something Superman knows a lot about as she has an elder sibling (Mina) already at her primary. As Holland et al. (2007) suggest:

...children use resources and networks to negotiate a move to a new school and become social actors who are able to settle in and ‘get on’...Networks of friends, acquaintances and siblings help them to become familiar with the school, find their way around, learn the unwritten rules and practices, and to become confident and settled (Holland et al., 2007: 101–102; also Fabian, 2000; Moska, 2010).

Superman does not view starting school as a solitary endeavour since Mina will be there and this is likely to limit any fears and increase feelings of excitement (Maclean, 1996; Einarsdottir, 2010; Loizou, 2011). Ostensibly, reaching the age of five and thus gaining access to school symbolises a significant progression for Superman.

For many children like Superman, reaching school age signals a time of ‘getting bigger’. However, not all children celebrate their age in the same way. Just because a child turns five does not mean that they automatically feel prepared for school, nor that they have the social resources to draw upon to negotiate the passage.

Omar (who had no older siblings) said: *‘I don’t want to go to school. I am too little to go’* (Lilybank field notes, May 2012). Omar was a tall boy and bigger than many of his peer group. It is unlikely that he perceived himself as too small physically, rather he felt too young. Intended to define his soon-to-be ‘school life’, Omar was given the message from his parents that ‘big boys’ go to school (Lilybank field notes, May 2012). Omar’s reality, however, was quite different and amongst the children who participated in the study, his perception was not unique. White (2014) claims that children are seldom asked to provide their points of view outside adult

frameworks. White may be right – whilst Omar did express his view within the adult framework, no one was listening. I would argue, however, that to ignore these powerful discourses is to ignore children’s realities.

Evidently, many children, rather than relating size to physicality, instead appropriate the concept of size to age, relative to peers. It can be this subjective self-perception which informs the nature of a child’s anticipation of primary school. Given the choice to go to school or wait another year, it is likely that Superman would have decided to go to school and Omar would have stayed at *Lilybank*.

Having previous knowledge of school did not encourage all children to look favourably on going there. Thomas the Tank Engine, who had an elder sibling at school would have, given the choice, made the decision not to go:

*Thomas the Tank Engine has an older sister who is now in [Primary] Two and will be starting [Primary] Three this August. He has been on school pick-ups and drop-offs and we’ve discussed the prospect of him starting school. Looking at the children coming out after school was finished, he would always feel overwhelmed. Whenever I have asked him if he was okay and what troubled him, he would say he didn’t think he could go to school, be around so many children... (Extract from a parental deferral application, May 2015).*

Thomas the Tank Engine was worried about the large number of children he would encounter (Moska, 2010). While visits to school supported some children, such as Cristiano Ronaldo and Superman, they only caused Thomas the Tank Engine more anxiety. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that ‘priming visits’ (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000) benefit all children. If children were given the choice on when they went to school, some would choose to go whilst others would choose to wait. However, posing this question of choice to children is dubious due to their lack of freedom on the matter. Children, quite simply, do not have a choice.

To summarise, expanding on insights from children and parents, the current study reveals that age is critical to the transition process. This study urges policy-makers to go beyond the limitations of age and consider what children and parents have to say. If children and parents did have the choice on whether to go to school or not, and

they were listened to, what children say could significantly change policy and practice.

Increasing parental choice within a more focused and transparent system would improve the management and conduct of the process and policy would likely become more meaningful to the individuals it concerns. Theory, policy and practice are not separate entities during transition. Policy formation should take place within a dialogic community of children and adults and places of significance to children. As Davis and Smith (2012) argue, meaning-making processes best take place in collaboration.

The second finding was that, when discussing transition with children and parents, different perspectives emerged. Children experience transition very differently from adults, both as individuals and as corporeal beings at a unique phase in their lifespan and as members of a learning community (Peters, 2011). Views amongst parents also differed. Some parents noted the importance of academic achievements while others said that they valued a holistic perspective. Even when talking about the same core skills, different people had different understandings. Some parents placed more importance on the child being able to hold a pencil, others on the child being sociable. There are divergent perspectives on transition based on different understandings of the necessary criteria (Adichie, 2009).

The results of this data suggest that we cannot assume all participants would like a choice regarding a deferred place. Judgments about whether children should stay in the early years setting for another year, or have a discretionary place allocated, can involve different things for different people and the process needs to be more open and transparent for all (Davis, 2011). No views can be ignored, nor can it be assumed one view is more or less worthy than the next. Despite attention being given to automatic deferrals and discretionary deferrals, both remain complex and the allocation of deferred places is subjective and, critically, not in the hands of those who know the child well.

Fundamentally, this section has added to the body of knowledge around professionalism and has answered research question two - *Are professional approaches to transition flexible?* - The data suggests that there is room for more flexible approaches. In particular, there is a need for policy-makers and practitioners

to explore the skills and capabilities of *all* children and discover how school can build on those skills (Dockett & Perry, 2013).

The age when children start school also needs more consideration. If policy-makers listened to children and parents, they would hear that some would like flexibility regarding the starting age. There needs to be some acknowledgement that the current school starting age is not suitable for all children. Further research needs to be carried out on the strengths and weaknesses of offering a variety of starting points and ages of transition.

### **4.3 Transition procedures into practice – different professional perspectives in early years settings and schools**

As mentioned previously, early years settings shoulder the responsibility of *preparing* the child for school, but the recent national procedures (*Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS)*, 2010) encourage all the sectors – early years, primary and secondary – to reconsider traditional practices and place emphasis on multidimensional connections in communication between settings.

Local authority transition procedures come via email and are disseminated to the person responsible in each early years establishment, such as, local authority nursery school, nursery class in a primary school, local authority private day nursery<sup>2</sup>, independent school nursery, playgroup, or registered childminder. Procedures contain similar information to the national guidance (LTS, 2010:8), neatly summarised as:

- **time is created for dialogue with children and practitioners.**
- **practitioners are to make most of personal learning plans in Primary One.**
- **expertise is shared amongst the sectors and active learning is promoted.**

How the principles of the national resource guidance are embedded in practice depends on the professionals who implement them. The next section will focus on

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<sup>2</sup> Only private providers who are working in partnership with the Local Authority will receive Scottish Government funding.

the approaches of early and primary setting professionals. This links to the previous section by illustrating the differences in professional approaches and how these affect the orchestration and facilitation of policy and practice and the impact on the children.

#### **4.3.1 A dialogic approach to transition processes**

I begin with a brief introduction to dialogism, the philosophically-informed pedagogy used by the early years setting; what will follow is information on how transition processes are orchestrated by the professionals who worked there. I hope that by understanding a little about dialogism, the reader will gain important insights into an alternative approach to transition processes which move beyond psychological and empirical approaches that dominate the field and limit the potential to see children (Sanders, 1988; Moss 2007).

The term dialogism has been loosely described as ‘a way of exploring the social event of ‘voice’ (or rather voices, plural) as learning’ (White, 2016:3). That is, the spoken and implicit dialogue that takes place between those involved, directly or indirectly. Practitioners in the early years setting claimed to adopt dialogic principles in their work with children and others (White, 2011; White 2016).

Defining dialogic pedagogy, Bakhtin said:

After all, language has a powerful effect on the thought processes of the person who generates it. Creative, original, exploratory thought that is in contrast with the richness and complexity of life cannot develop on a substrate consisting of the forms of depersonalized, clichéd, bookish language. The further fate of a student’s creative potential, to a great extent, depends on the language he takes with him out of...school. And this is the instructor’s responsibility (Bakhtin, 2004:24).

One of the strengths of dialogism is that it offers an alternative to authoritative strongholds evident in more traditional educational spheres (Dahlberg & Taguchi, 1994; Meade, 2000; Jordan, 2004). As a result of this approach, the practitioners had complex, evolving, participatory relationships with the children and their families (Hart, 1992; Wood 1998; Shier, 2001). That is not to say all the practitioners carried out similar practices – quite the opposite. As they confronted their own ideologies

and practices, and those of others, this resulted in a variety of discourses in the social production of meaning.

Interestingly, the practitioners claimed that they did not pre-plan or control the transition processes, magnanimously granting agency through such endeavours; it was stressed that each child experienced transition in different ways, allowing for creativity and growth and open points of wonderment. The shared vision of this dialogic approach was laid out in the setting's *Standard Quality Improvement Plan*:

*At Lilybank, through a dialogic process in which children and adults participate together... [there] is a space of possibilities and of experimentation, where children are viewed as capable of achieving the unexpected. Listening to the children... has encouraged practitioners to loosen the constraints of predictable outcomes and received wisdom, which has exposed us to new perspectives, new possibilities and new understandings. The practitioners are well-educated and their education equips them with an understanding of the importance of listening to and being 'attuned' to children. (Lilybank Standard Quality Improvement Plan (S.Q.I.P), 2012:6).*

The dialogic approach enabled staff to view their work as a mutual exchange, or as 'a dance of positions in the dialogic space of possible positions' (Wegerif, 2007:13), as opposed to adults' privileged voices over children (Hart & Schwab, 1999; Fennimore, 2008; Lester & Russell, 2008). Overall, there was an uncertainty about staff practice, as it was fundamentally unresolved and ambivalent – whilst they were articulate about their principles, they would not commit to knowing what was happening each day as they located the children and themselves in the here and now (Uprichard, 2008).

There was no attempt, for example, to determine what children should be doing or should be learning. In some ways the team appeared free from the heavy emphasis of top-down assessment and planning, as they worked *with* the children listening and responding to them (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Burman, 2009). However, the constantly changing ideas were not an easy fit for all the professionals to understand or practise:

*Having not heard of Lilybank prior to applying for a job, I wasn't aware of the ethos or principles. It all sounded great and rang true with my own thoughts on childcare, therefore I thought I'd hit the ground running; however, this didn't turn out to be the case. Although I felt strongly on children's rights, and [children's] self-reliance and autonomy, in practical terms this was a huge step up from my previous experiences of childcare settings. I found it very difficult to adjust to, and during the worst times regretted taking the job at all. I felt incredibly out of my depth, everyone else seemed so knowledgeable about [name of philosopher] and in touch with the rhythm of the centre, children and families. I found it difficult to let go of that need for control that seemed to be holding me back (Scott Paddington, September, 2014 - Lilybank).*

Scott Paddington (S.P.) illustrated that there were many different people in *Lilybank*, each with diverse – sometimes personally or professionally conflicted – ‘ideological orientations...which interact and outweigh each other’ (White, 2016:151). Whilst S.P. was initially tantalised by the thought of *Lilybank*, he became quickly disillusioned and felt ‘out of his depth’. S. P. thought that the shift from settings where authoritative dogma lived and formalist approaches were privileged, to a dialogic setting, would be an easy fit for him, but his ideas seemed incompatible. The de-crowning of hierarchy and power challenged him (Foucault, 1977). The practice of others had, according to S. P., supremacy over his thoughts and experience (Creswell & Teucher, 2011). The excerpt also illustrated that we can never encounter other discourses (or others) without being affected as in Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin, 1993; 1994).

While humbling, it is important to acknowledge that S.P.'s frustrations may not refer to him alone. There may be other professionals in *Lilybank* who question the shared, centralised meanings of the team. As S.P. revealed, on the outside he was ‘getting on with the job’ and ‘fitting in’, while he was actually in turmoil and essentially living on the boundary of the setting. Further, what S. P. highlighted was that individuals can be experiencing or observing the same thing, but see it very differently.

However, White (2016) would suggest that whilst S. P. was engaging with others in the setting, he was evaluating them as they were evaluating him – whether they realised it or not. Bakhtin (1993) reminds us of the assumptions that each person

brings to their relationships with others, the consequences of these, and of the ‘profound task of living in an uncertain, polyphonic world’ (White, 2016:13). Appreciating this complexity is important in early years settings.

Whilst disruption enables creative spaces and opportunities (Davis et al., 2012), it also creates confusion, which is likely to impact on experiences within the centre. In a similar way to the children and others, S. P. was constantly evolving and always *becoming* as ideas shaped and influenced his practice and that of others (Clarke, 2005). It may be helpful to use a beginning example to highlight how children transformed this space:

*The children enjoyed going to the centre’s nature kindergarten (see Figure 4), but due to the cost to parents (for the bus and site fees), children could attend only when their parents agreed to pay, usually once a week. The nature kindergarten was available two or three days each week. Some children wanted to attend two or three times each week, others wanted to attend more. Aspirational discussions between the children, parents and professionals took place over several months. The children stressed that they would like the nature kindergarten to be available five days each week. To the professionals this seemed impossible at first. Ideas were shared. A business plan was presented to the local authority that outlined a strategy that would make the nature kindergarten available five days each week, to all children at no cost...it was agreed that more work would need to be taken on by the centre to make the option viable. After several meetings the local authority agreed and now the nature kindergarten is available to all children five days each week at no cost to the parents. Children can choose when they wish to go, who with and when. (Elizabeth, practitioner, August 2014 - Lilybank)*

What Elizabeth was explaining was that, through a dialogic approach, the children took the opportunity to transform their world. The practitioner was not seen as the expert who passed knowledge onto the child, ideas were shared instead (Gilbert, 2005; Wegerif, 2006). As Moss (2014) puts it, transformative change is ongoing and constant, it is not pre-planned, but open-ended and constantly becoming.

The emphasis of ‘transformation’ may, at first glance, seem to have very little to do with transition. Yet on closer examination, it becomes apparent that this pedagogy of dialogism underpinned other areas of practice, as will be seen later in this chapter,



and subsequently impacted on transition processes. Elizabeth expressed openness to the possibility of new understandings and new ways of thinking and acting. If the day to day interactions change constantly, so too must the professional responses.

However, on a cautionary note, in order to ameliorate practice it is important to recognise the complex, (and sometimes) irreconcilable nature of relationships. It can prove to be a constant struggle to find ways to include *all* children in a group setting while treating children as complex subjects in their own right (Tisdall et al., 2009). A dialogic approach never allows any one voice to consume another, but that is challenging to accomplish in an early years centre.

The changes in the example given were complex and it must be acknowledged that the multiple voices of some children were privileged over others. All the children were brought into the full polyphony of others – they may have felt compelled to agree with them, they may not have had any personal interest in having the nature kindergarten run five days each week, but it happened anyway. In this way, some children were expected to be submissive or manipulated, as having the nature kindergarten five days each week would undoubtedly have had an impact on the experiences of the children left behind, who may be left competing for adult attention.

My argument is that, whilst it was the quest of the centre to practise dialogism, there were challenges implementing dialogism. Proponents of dialogism have argued ‘there is no prescription, no linear system, but ideas intertwine, twist, and loop back on themselves, and that when taken together, offer powerful insights into new ways of thinking and acting’ (White & Peters, 2011:235). In *Lilybank* this meant that the practitioners were on a never-ending journey as they collided and competed with themselves and others, and through these dialectical understandings they constantly generated meanings as a source of insight (Davis & Smith, 2012).

#### **4.3.2 Understanding and implementing transition processes and procedures**

Taking the previous section into consideration, it must be indubitably acknowledged that professionals hold diverse and complex views and interpret policy and practices in different ways (Ungar, 2002; Eke, Butcher & Lee, 2009; Davis 2011). There is no intention here to present a singular truth, that only one characterisation of professional practice exists in education contexts. Instead, this writing acknowledges the difference and diversity of all professionals, essential in a dialogic world (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005).

The local authority in this study is recognised as a diverse one that echoes the society in which it exists. The professionals it employs reflect this diversity and differ in terms of social class, gender, disability, family structure, sexual orientation, family status, minority groups, minority ethnic groups and majority groups. All the professionals in this study were qualified, skilled and considered competent.

However, becoming a qualified practitioner was not a threshold to be passed – it was a continuous process of learning and training (*Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), 2014*). Nevertheless, none of the practitioners in this study had ever attended a training event specifically on transition and how to support it. How the team enabled transition was through empirical knowledge gained over years of working with young children.

Refreshingly, one professional explained how she was willing to stand up against traditional ideas concerning transition, often heard in contemporary education environments:

*'At Lilybank we aim to provide an honest transition. Often the word smooth is used, but any transition has the potential to be bumpy' (Lileen de Lissa, practitioner, May 2012 - Lilybank).*

This practitioner challenged the myth of certainty and critiqued the idea that 'smooth transition' requires continuation. She argued that the early years setting and the school are two vastly different arenas which represented spatial, relational and temporal changes for children that could be smooth and bumpy. Her perspective was similar to the work of a growing number of authors who argue that when seeking to offer flexibility we should be open to the smooth and bumpy aspects of transition (Cleave et al., (1982), Curtis, (1986), Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, (2000), Podmore,

Sauvao & Mapa, (2001) Fabian and Dunlop, (2002), Dockett & Perry, (2007) and others).

These scholars provide a convincing argument that the transition to school is complex and multifaceted (Woodhead & Moss, 2007; Einarsdottir 2007; Johansson 2002; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002, Margetts, 2000); and that children will experience change which will shape current and future transitions (Cleave et al., 1982; Renwick, 1984; Pollard, 1996; Ledger et al., 1998; Glen & Elder, 1998; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Margetts, 2002; Fabian & Dunlop and others). In *Lilybank*, while talk of going to school started in November (when parents made applications) the actual transition processes began in April:

*What the children need from us are opportunities to talk about the new environment they are moving to... we will have meetings with the children to provide a forum for discussing school, what their school is like, sharing thoughts and information with their peers about playgrounds, uniforms, etc. This process also starts as early as April, after the Easter break. (Lian, practitioner, May 2012 - Lilybank).*

Corsaro and Molinari call these experiences ‘priming events’:

Priming events involve activities in which children, by their very participation, attend prospectively to ongoing or anticipated changes in their lives (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000:16).

Corsaro and Molinari (2000) found that ‘priming events’ carried out in early years settings were valuable in helping children adjust to school rules, schedules and participant structures. In carrying out the ‘priming events’, the practitioners in *Lilybank* were ontologists who encouraged dialogue, consensus and dissent as equally valuable means of understanding each child’s perception of transition. Any interpretation of priming events by the early years professionals was intimately bound up with children’s narratives, as opposed to transition experiences being mediated through the voices of adults (Hart & Schwab, 1997; Lester & Russel, 2008).

One example was the regular ‘mind-mapping’ sessions that took place between April and May (2012) (*Figure 13*). Sessions included children who were going to

school and other interested children who would be going the following year. Overall, the sessions reflected differences among and between children in terms of life experiences, class background, age, gender, disability and ethnicity. The following vignette is my experience of attending a mind-mapping session:

*The practitioner has a large sheet of paper under her arm and some coloured pens. A small group of ten children are waiting in the hallway chatting to each other. The door has to be opened by an adult as the handle is high. We go up a few stairs into a lamp-lit room, away from the hustle and bustle of the busy playrooms. It is quiet here. As we enter, the children, still chatting amongst themselves, sit on the floor in a circle. I take a seat out of the circle so that I can observe the group. There is a mixture of girls and boys, mostly from 'the big room'<sup>3</sup>. Some children sit very close to their classmates, others sit with a little space to either side. The practitioner explains what I am doing there, namely 'to find out what they would like to do at school'.*

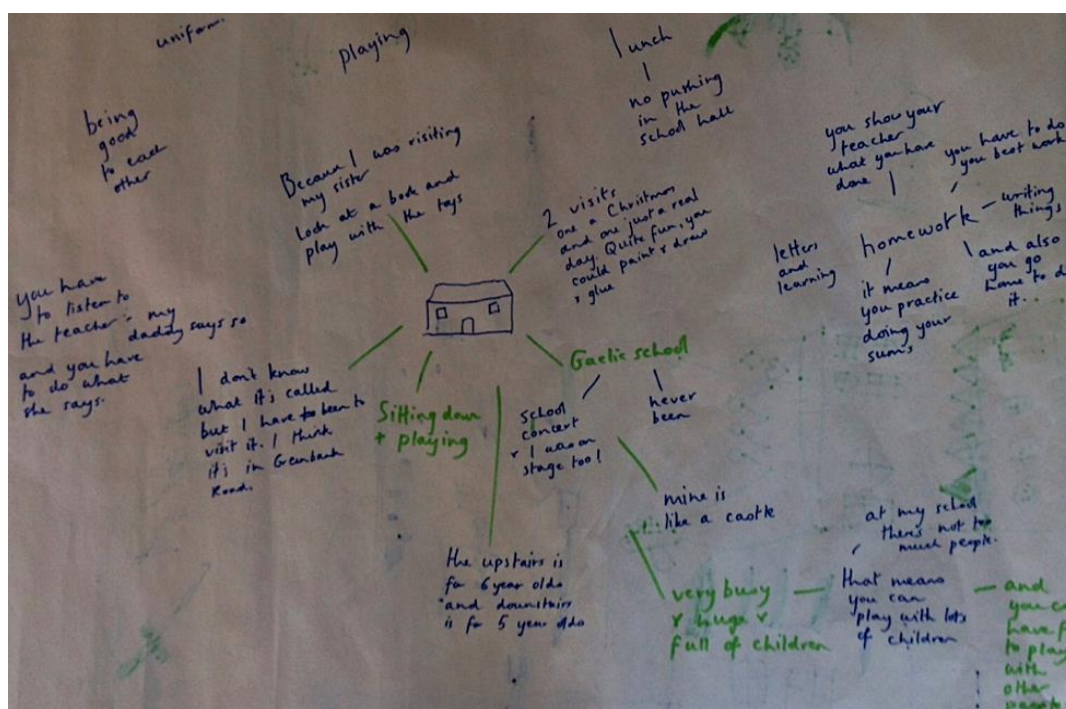


Figure13: Example of a mind-mapping session

<sup>3</sup> 'The big room' is what the children call the room that is the biggest of all the playrooms and is mostly occupied by children aged 3-5 years.

*The practitioner lays out a large piece of green sugar paper in the centre of the circle. The children are quieter now. Some are finishing off their chatting, but mostly all the children have stopped and are watching the practitioner laying out the paper. The practitioner checks that everyone is comfortable. She begins the session by saying, 'I would like to know what you like doing in nursery.' (This was explained to me later as a way of beginning with something the children were more familiar with before moving onto something less familiar.) The children begin to express divergent views on what they like doing in nursery. The practitioner writes down what the children are saying. Clearly they are familiar with this practice as they wait patiently while she writes. At times she clarifies with them what she has written as a way of capturing exactly what each one said.*

*The practitioner now asks, 'What would like to do in school?' The children look more thoughtful, and they take more time to respond. Then some children share their views while others are more reserved, more cerebral and thoughtful. Some chose not to give a response. Interestingly, the children all wait for the others to speak – there is no sense of one child dominating the session. Throughout, the practitioner gives children time to think, and time to discuss what they have said and after she has written it down she checks it. If the children do not agree with what has been written, as was the case with one child, changes are made, and are reflected on the sheet. The practitioner responded at times by being very surprised by what the children were saying – impressed by their knowledge?*

*When everyone has had a say, the practitioner thanks the children. She then rolls up the sheet and gathers the pens. The children get up and prepare to leave. The practitioner explains that the children's comments will be pinned to a notice board in the 'big room' and from this the children and practitioners may plan specific events. The door was opened and the children went back to their play. The session lasted 50 minutes (Field notes, April 2012).*

During this mind-mapping session the children were personally and meaningfully engaged. In claiming this I have drawn from the definitions of Fredericks, Blumenfield and Paris (2004), that the children illustrated *behavioural* engagement where they participated fully in the mind-mapping experience; they were *emotionally* engaged as they reacted positively with the practitioner (although Fredericks et al., (2004) maintain emotional engagement includes negative responses too) and the children were *cognitively* engaged as they thoughtfully shared their knowledge, experiences and emotions concerning transition (Raino & Hoffman, 2015). The

professional invited the children to the session and, by accepting, their willingness to participate was interpreted as a sign of engagement (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Spyrou, 2011).

Each child took a turn to share, as mind-mapping would not be possible if there was one dominating voice. The knowledge, experiences and emotions that the children shared corroborated the idea that children have their own life-force or agency (Foucault, 1998; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Tisdall et al., 2009).

The children did not merely copy a response from their peers. Uncertain or undecided about their own thoughts, each child made their own contribution based on their own evolving experience – although it must be considered that through the constant interplay of social forces, children were learning from each other (*Figure 13*). At times their responses were candid in their understanding of the school context:

*‘I don’t know what I will do at school, because it’s not the same as nursery. I might write’ (Mind-mapping session, May 2012 - Lilybank; Figures 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18).*

Some children’s quotes aligned with other children, while others greatly expanded on the knowledge of the group, including the professional facilitating the session (Dockett & Perry, 2002). It could be argued that the mind-mapping session was a form of early intervention, where the child is placed within deficit paradigms, exacerbated by the knowledgeable interrogation of the adult who seeks to provide the child with information (Farquhar & White, 2014).



Figure 14: What do you like doing at nursery?

However, there was no sense of the practitioner driving the children's will and I suggest that the mind-mapping sessions were useful in supporting children to anticipate transition changes (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000). From the mind-mapping sessions, practitioners built on what the children said, making changes to the transition process as well as supporting the children to develop their knowledge about transition (Kellett, 2011; Davis & Smith, 2012).

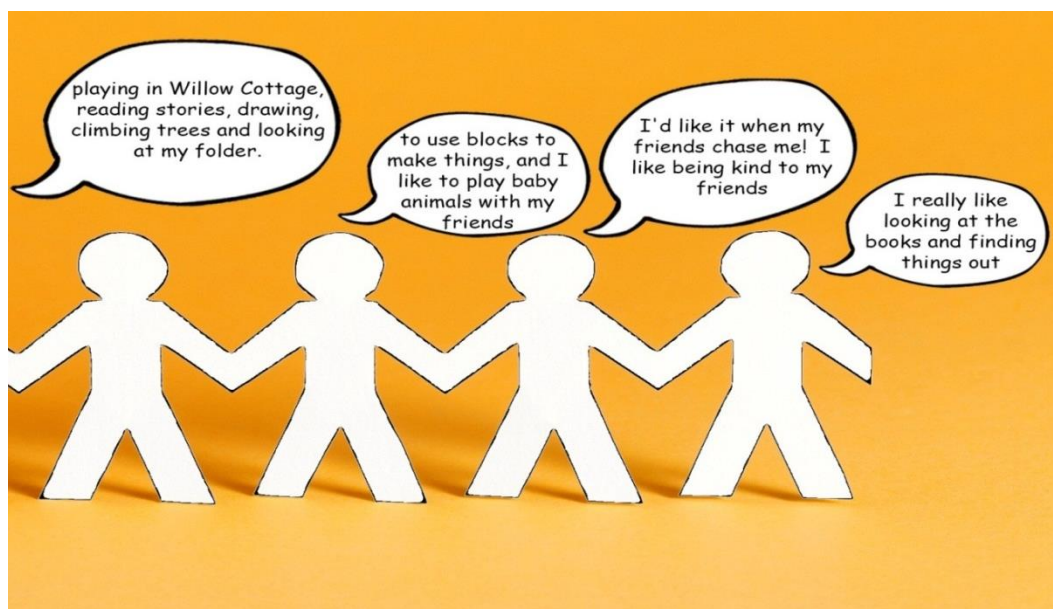


Figure 15: What do you like doing at nursery?

As the time for going to school drew closer, another mind-mapping session (June 2012) revealed that children expressed an understanding, not only of the knowledge required when starting school, such as literacy and maths, but also of the values that underpin the school and the compromises they may need to make with regards to the notion of participation. As Alcock (2013), puts it: ‘The child that played is replaced by regulated learning-to-learn, an automaton to fit the industrial system’ (Alcock, 2013:29). The children’s responses were markedly different from the earlier sessions:

One child ventured, ‘*You have to listen to the teacher – my daddy says so and you have to do what she says.*’ The quote encapsulates the authority of the parent over their child, and more broadly, of adults over children as a social category (UN General Assembly, 1989). It is an exhortation used to regulate specific behaviour. This child’s statement contributes to further understanding of how social relationships become inscribed with social meanings and how these get constructed and reconstructed over time (Bacon, 2012).

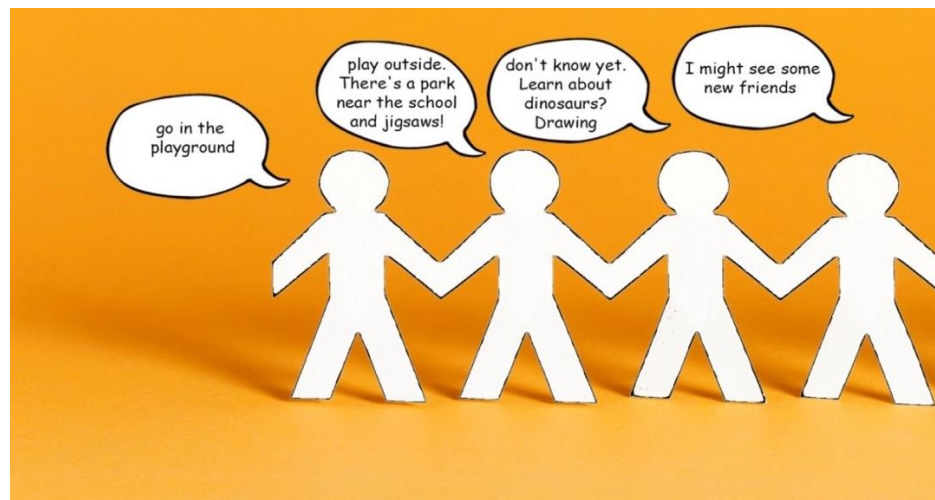


Figure 16: What would you like to do when at school?



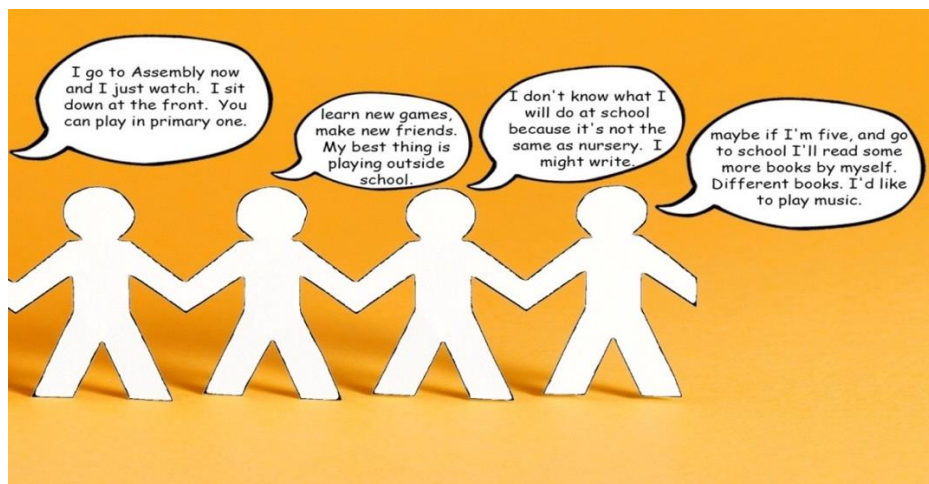


Figure17: What would you like to do when at school?

As James and James argue:

...control is sometimes sought in order to prescribe some kinds of behaviour and to proscribe others, and not on the grounds of welfare but simply on the grounds of conformity...a simple and yet very clear reflection of the process by which social order is maintained across and between generations (James & James, 2004:3).

Notably, when the child in the above example explained what his father had said, none of his peers raised an objection, underscoring a culture of conformity (Hendrick, 1997).



Figure 18: What do you know about your school?

As mentioned elsewhere, Gill et al. (2006) suggest that 'researchers have noted that parents' beliefs play an important role in shaping children's early experiences and that children are likely to learn those skills that are prized within a culture' (Gill

et al., 2006:215). Inevitably, children test out their potential to act in ways that go against what they have been ‘taught or told to do’ (James & James, 2004:4, also Tallant, 2015). However, just before the children were due to leave *Lilybank* they were beginning to show signs of becoming more compliant and uncritical of school life, illustrating an expectation that ‘...the rules of democracy [may] not belong to them’ (Bosio, 2012:144).

One example involved two four-year-olds, Rory and Mark. As part of his morning routine, Mark would climb on a chair at reception to wave goodbye to his mother and sister. His friend Rory observed this one day and warned Mark that things were going to change:

*You won't be able to wave to your mum when you go to school. There are no windows. You have to say goodbye at the gate and you won't see her again until home time (Rory to Mark, both four years, June 2014 - Lilybank).*

Regardless of their present experience at *Lilybank*, the children predicted for themselves the lack of an influential voice in the school setting (Henrick, 1997; Lawrance, 2010). When Hill (2005) researched *Children's Boundaries*, he noted that children may choose to belong to particular systems and structures rather than be rescued from them. In agreement with Hill (2005), the children were accepting a suspension of their agency. As Tisdall and Punch (2012) write, ‘just as children...should have the right to not participate, they should also be able to choose not to assert their agency’ (Tisdall & Punch, 2012:256). Some children accept conformity and feel safe within it – other children rebel (Gallagher, 2004; Tallant, 2015). Not all children want the same thing from school life. But, due to the lack of flexibility in policy, not all children have the choice.

In order to facilitate transition effectively, Lileen de Lissa argued that ‘honesty’ lay at the heart of the transition process. She said:

*Charlotte and I went to visit [name of school]. On the bus she chatted excitedly about school, about being a school girl and buying her uniform. When we got to the school the gates were all closed*

*and it took a few minutes to find the entrance. Charlotte held onto my hand and looked up at the building. She observed that the school was 'very big' and she was just 'little'. We found the reception and were shown into a small ante room to wait for the head teacher. Charlotte sat down next to me and this little girl who had chatted so happily all the way was suddenly mute. I reminded her about when she first started nursery, she had been quite little, but now she was one of the biggest children there.*

*When the head teacher arrived [she] introduced [herself] and began addressing Charlotte. Charlotte would not respond. I did not want to answer for her, but assured the head that we had been chatting about it [school] all the way. As we were shown around, Charlotte did look with interest but remained close by my side, her little hand clasped in mine. On the way back to nursery, I spoke to Charlotte about the school being very big and new and different, and that it was okay to feel a little bit scared or unsure, because new things take a little getting used to. Practitioners (and parents I'm sure) hope for a smooth transition but I believe that we should aim for an honest transition. School will be a very different experience and we have a duty to explore **all** [emphasis added] the emotions that new experiences and environments may evoke (Lileen de Lissa, practitioner, May 2012 - Lilybank).*

Being honest with Charlotte by acknowledging the obstacles that she may face in school is likely to support her transition, as the first contact young children have with it is crucial to the quality of their school experience in later years (Ames, Rojas & Portugal, 2010). Being able to see the transition process from a child's point of view changes everything – 'without children's perspectives there cannot be a complete account of transition' (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005:73). In her role as 'dialogic provocateur', Lileen de Lissa encouraged Charlotte to share her views freely (White 2011). The relationship Charlotte and Lileen de Lissa shared was a precursor for this effective, honest dialogue. Thoughts about going to school were not simply isolated in Charlotte's individual consciousness; Charlotte's thoughts were shaped and developed through verbal expression.

Lileen de Lissa used the journey to and from the school to fully explore what concerns Charlotte had. Through this relational dialogue, Lileen de Lissa was in a position to reassure and comfort Charlotte by sharing her view that 'new things take a little getting used to' and may have helped Charlotte develop new understandings of what school could be like. Through this process Lileen de Lissa also learned what

fears and anticipations Charlotte had – fears that may be very different from other children she takes to school (Mundane & Giugni, 2006).

It also must be considered, as illustrated by Superman and Omar above, that each child has different characteristics and different family circumstances (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). However, some of what Charlotte expressed was not unique – some scholars have reported that children have expressed concern about the size of the school in relation to themselves (Moss & Petrie, 2002; Dockett, 2004; Simoncini, 2010).

In summary, a dialogic approach in the early years setting requires openness to complex perspectives, procedures and interrelated practices and introduces new power dynamics and new points of view on institutional life. The practitioners above were required to follow top-down transition procedures and practices, but approached them dialogically – in practice this meant less rigidly, enabling them to listen and respond to children, their parents and each other. I found that no two practitioners responded the same way to the children. Whilst they claimed to be equitable, effective, inclusive and welcoming to all, they all differed in their approach. Further, the professionals did not try to *explain* their practice as the only way of doing things. Each practitioner used innovative ways to carry out priming events and this was underpinned by relationships they shared with each other.

One practitioner explained how she questioned the conventional aims of a 'smooth' transition, and instead she argued for more honesty in the process; this she argued would enable more engagement in dialogue that opened up possibilities and different ways of thinking for the child. There were tensions however, as not all the children had access to the same opportunities. Although this was undoubtedly unintended, it happened.

One example was that not all practitioners took children on school visits, because of prohibitions and restrictions determined by the various schools. Children then suffered from socio-hierarchical inequalities, as the head teachers in some schools prevented visits. It is this disparity that the practitioners have yet to overcome.

Given the evidence outlined above from the mind-mapping sessions, it is no surprise that children's knowledge of school increased as the time to start came closer. However, challenges remained as some parents informed their children about

how they should respond at school. For many children, compliance with school structures is what they expected, which suggests very little flexibility in transitional approaches. Importantly, however, I would conclude from my observations of the children, that some children may *suspend* their agency, but not necessarily give it up (also James & James, 2004) and that children should have the flexibility within transition processes to do this.

### **4.3.3 Challenges to multidimensional communications between contexts**

Bringing together professionals concerned with transition is a key factor in promoting an effective process (Hartley et al., 2012; also Bailey, 1999). According to Davis and Smith (2012), a collaborative dialogic approach enables professionals to engage with one another and provides the opportunity to establish partnerships and share critical information about the child (also Bennett, 2013). The professional relationship between them, or their intersubjectivity, should be at the heart of all dialogic encounters (White, 2016).

Davis and Smith (2012) put forward that such encounters take time – time to get to know each other, and time to consider the multiple voices each professional brings to the experience. Davis and Smith (2012) explain that respectful, trusting and concerned professional dialogue can open up a view of dialogue that is open-ended, which can result in more possibilities and meaningful responses (also Burbules, 1993). Critically, Davis and Smith (2012) argue that no party should be forced into consensus and all voices should be heard, which can be problematic in dominant political or normative discourses found in educational settings.

During the transition process the opportunity for dialogic encounter is organised through visits to and from settings. Corsaro & Molinari (2000) argue that, when used thoughtfully, this exchange can contribute towards an effective transition for the child. However, when school professionals agree to visit the early years setting as part of the process, sometimes these visits do not always take place, with devastating consequences for the child:

*Throughout the morning Sophia expectantly awaited the arrival of her head teacher, Mrs Black. She asked me on several occasions 'When will my teacher be here?' Sophia asked me how to write 'Mrs Black', as she prepared a gift for her. Sophia also involved two of her close friends in drawing pictures for her, placing each one [gift] in an envelope addressed to 'Mrs Black'. Sophia explained her intention to surprise Mrs Black in the hallway when she arrived. Later, in the afternoon, Sophia told me, 'My teacher just passed the nursery, Rory saw her, she's got short hair.' As 2pm approached (45 minutes after the arranged time) our administrator called Sophia's school. It emerged that the head teacher could no longer make the visit. Sophia became very upset. It took quite a while before she recovered and returned to play. She had some snack and soon after I found she had fitted her body into the small window ledge in the hall with her head buried in her lap... (Cheryl, practitioner, May 2015).*

Disappointing as this was for Sophia, the teacher had no intention of not coming; rather she got caught up with other work. Professionals in educational contexts are very busy people. While writing this thesis my views of school professionals have changed. I would once have expressed disappointment and even anger at the professionals who did not turn up to visit the soon-to-be schoolchild. I would have (I now know wrongly) assumed that the arranged visits were made in a superficial and tokenistic way.

However, during this thesis I have come to understand some of the complexities in relation to their role and the isolation they can suffer (Dussault et al., 1999). Likewise, Stephen (2006) discovered tensions exist for professionals as they make choices between centrifugal tasks (Foucault, 1980). The pressure on school professionals is not always fully understood by early years professionals and situations such as this can create ideological and institutional barriers between the contexts:

*In my experience, the response to come and visit the children has been disappointing in the uptake. The children and their parents express delight and excitement when a visit is scheduled, and the children in particular look forward to this event. Unfortunately, it is not always the class teacher who is able to come, but rather the head teacher or deputy head teacher. Unfortunately, the visits can be disappointingly fleet. I appreciate that the schools may have*

*many children starting and may have many nurseries to visit, but I do feel transition is such an important time, and the opportunity to see the children within this environment is fundamental to developing a feeling of who the child is and where they were coming from. Our philosophy is so concerned with celebrating the uniqueness of children, and I feel this may be lost in the school environment, where knowledge transmission, uniformity and compliance are enacted. That is one of the reasons we want to share what happens here with class teachers, so that they can experience a real insight into the life of the child, which I believe should still feature in their school life. (Jessica, practitioner, June 2012 - Lilybank).*

In the above example Jessica argues the importance of the ‘visitor’ paying attention to the unique child in their own context, giving the opportunity for professionals to reflect critically and adapt (assumed) teaching subjectivities. This example illustrated Jessica’s understanding of the complexity and differences of the two educational contexts, which are political and interrelated within dominant societal and institutional discourses.

For example, Jessica wanted to be given the opportunity to share her understandings of the dialogic approach of *Lilybank*, where communication with the children transforms their experiences, and not a curriculum that replicates an existing world (Moss, 2014). The concern that Jessica raised about ‘knowledge transmission and understanding’ suggested a finished child, with narrowly defined outcomes, which are generally economically determined (Nuthall, 2007). Jessica was keen to share the value of participation and an unfinished child (Osberg et al., 2008).

Adding to the complexity, Cartmel (2007) argues that practitioners who work in different contexts not connected to the school can regard themselves as being outsiders to the school and consequent transition processes. Davis and Smith (2012) contend that policy-makers need to consider that professionals need time to implement [transition] policies.

However, whether visits happen or not, the child’s transition record is shared from the early years setting to school. These are personal records of the children’s achievements and specific characteristics, as can be seen in the following extracts taken from transition reports for 2011–12:

*'Ross has a strong sense of justice and is a person with deep emotions. He is very loving and a proud big brother to his sister Rose. He has excellent motor skills in moving around at high speed, usually with some form of wheeled vehicle as a police officer!'*

*'Molly is a kind, caring empathetic child who appears completely comfortable in the nursery environment. In recent months her confidence has grown hugely, evidenced by an animated 'pirate' register that she led for her peers, where she performed with growing humour and growing delight at her friends' positive response to her efforts.'*

*'Over the past year Andrew has been a wonderful ambassador for Lilybank, showing visitors around our Eco-School, taking visitors to our Forest School site, and helping collect the award for the Biodiversity competition. He is someone who, as well as being deeply caring towards his family and friends, can show kindness and respect to our new or younger children. Over the last few months Andrew has been developing tremendous physical skills as he balances and carries water from our new pump in containers during outdoors and sand play...'*

*'Often the instigator of play and exploration, David has lots of ideas to investigate at nursery, leading his peers especially in water play outdoors and making rules for games. David is physically very agile and brave, jumping, pushing bikes, running with enormous energy...'*

What the practitioner aimed to capture in this report writing was 'the child': who they were and what their interests were. When the report was completed it was shared with parents. Parents then had the opportunity to record their views and add further comments. However, during the data collection stage, this procedure became more formalised and academic. The practitioner at *Lilybank* raised her concerns about this new procedure:

*Attached please find a word doc 'Minnie', which is the original form we were given to do the reports this session. On page three, you'll see at the top of the form the words about using a tracker and not needing to fill in the information for parents.*

*My view on this, the first time we've been asked to use trackers, is what does this say about how we work with parents? If you attach a tracker, you don't need to fill in the information for parents, so all they would be left with would be the tick boxes of a tracker (Figure 19), and what kind of information would they get from that? I don't think that they would find that nearly as useful and informative as a*



written summary and their individual child's achievements (Jane, practitioner, 2014 - Lilybank).

<b>Literacy Assessment and Planning Tracker</b>	
<i>Experience and Outcome</i>	<i>Skill</i>
<i>I enjoy exploring and playing with the patterns and sounds of language, and I can use what I learn.</i>	<p><i>'In play and games I recognise initial sounds and find other words beginning with the same sound'</i></p> <p><i>'I can use alliteration and make up silly phrases (smelly socks, big bananas).'</i></p> <p><i>'I can clap or tap the correct number of syllables in my own name.'</i></p>
<i>I enjoy exploring and choosing stories and other texts to watch, read or listen to, and can share my likes and dislikes.</i>	<p><i>'I often choose stories/texts to look at within the nursery environment.'</i></p> <p><i>'I can explain why I like or dislike a text.'</i></p> <p><i>'I can talk about real and imaginary experiences.'</i></p>
<i>I enjoy exploring events and characters in stories and other texts, sharing my thoughts in different ways.</i>	<p><i>'I can sit and listen to stage-appropriate stories.'</i></p> <p><i>'I can name key characters in a story.'</i></p>

Figure 19: Extract from a literacy tracker

In recent years, the local authority under study has encouraged practitioners to work towards the enhancement of academically-oriented skills, focusing on recognising letters of the alphabet, pre-writing activities, drawing and so on (Figure 19) (Dockett & Perry, 2013). Jane's main concern was that this process carries adult intentions and that by placing an emphasis on literacy and numeracy trackers, a vision of the child as human capital was being promoted (Apple, 2006; Davies, 2009).

Transition records would simply reflect that early years experiences were geared towards teaching specific skills that prepared children for school entry, resulting in narrowly defined outcomes and defined strategies to produce workers (Nuthall, 2007). This would result in literacy and numeracy being key goals and, significantly, there would be no requirement for parents to comment on the transition record.

This may result in parents seeing themselves as consumers, buying into an early years setting and expecting it to deliver educational outcomes. Further, ‘tracking’ illustrates how power is exercised over children by excluding alternative ways of understanding (Foucault, 1980). This lack of flexibility in approach contrasts with the recent *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*, which guides practitioners to be less rigid in practice and listen more to children.

The transition information is not neutral, but contested. The tracker required a subjective view to complete and the statements can be easily challenged to question meaning, context or validity. The transition record would emerge as a preselected checklist which is formulated from what the local authority values as important attributes for the school child to have. Like Jane, I value the richer written record constructed through my knowledge of the child, while the local authority tick-lists are indicative of a skill-based approach, which suggests that when children arrive at school they will sit and listen and absorb the information. There is little space for creativity, enquiry and thinking.

While educational procedures and standards vary widely across the local authority, the participant practitioners in this study confessed that, due to the bureaucratic burden placed on them, they simply did not have the time to read the transitional reports (Saluja et al., 2000; Vecchioti, 2003). One candidly told me: ‘*I am sorry, I just never have the time to read those reports*’ (Teacher, September 2012).

There is no attempt here to criticise the teachers. The power lies with the local authority to allow time to read reports, or the autonomy for teachers to be creative in their approach.

## Conclusions of Chapter Four

The research questions addressed in this section were:

1. *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?*
2. *Are professional approaches to transition flexible?*

The findings from this chapter answered the question: *Are professional approaches to transition flexible?* and indicate that it is possible to have flexible professional approaches to transition. But there is also a need for the local authority to relax procedures (Moss, 2013), such as allowing children and parents more say in when their child starts school. If the child and parent select to stay at nursery for an additional year, it should be made possible in the child's current setting. Parents would benefit from having more information on what their choices are.

When participatory approaches are implemented, much can be achieved. Strategies to facilitate transition, such as transition reports and visits to and from school, will only be successful if resources are put in place to support their implementation. Awareness of the importance of what supports and develops effective transition practices needs to be promoted.

Using trackers to check a child's progress, rather than personalised written reports on which parents could comment, is a tokenistic way of involving the child and their family. Rather than paying lip service to consultation, doing so should be an integral part of the process.

Further, from the children it was made clear that they expected to be controlled in the school institution. Some parents too wanted their child to be compliant. This is explored in much more depth in the following section as power, and how it is implemented in schools, featured greatly in the data collection, from children, their parents and members of staff.

Additionally, this chapter answered the question: *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?* Children, parents and practitioners were aware of how policy is connected to practice, but policy-makers exercised power over them by subjugating their requests for change. This resulted in some children, parents and practitioners feeling powerless in transition processes.

In this chapter *power* emerged as a serious concept to consider when discussing transitions. In particular, power and how it is exercised in educational transition policy, was found to impact greatly on the lived lives of children and their families. Parents illustrated a deep awareness of how policy was (mis)interpreted. Furthermore, I discovered that, despite good intentions, some aspects of transition

policy were never enacted, at least not as they were intended (e.g. information sharing between locales). The data from the children and parents suggested to me that there is a flaw in the deferral system, whereby people unknown to the child made decisions about the child's life (Tee, 2011). Evidently the relevance of power in transitional research is a significant nodal point to consider. The next chapter explores power by interpreting data that suggests power is totalising.

## Chapter Five: Totalising power

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented information on the structures, choices and uncertainties in the transition process. I ended the chapter with the proposition that professional approaches to transition could be more flexible. I discovered a flaw in the system whereby decisions were made about children by people unknown to them. I argued that children, parents and significant others, such as professionals, should be involved in transition policy creation.

In this chapter I address the following research questions:

3. *How do children navigate the complexity of transitions?*
4. *How fluid are the power relations in transition?*
5. *What happens when children arrive at school?*

To do so I draw from Jennifer Gore's (1995) analytics of power (e.g., *surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation and regulation*). Gore (1995) shared Foucault's view that power is 'ubiquitous', 'ever-changing' and 'benign'. I have framed this chapter using Gore's categorisations and I argue that the totalising discourse impacts on the lived lives of children and others in a variety of ways. One example would be through organisational principles such as professional norms and institutional procedures.

Hence, the field notes, children's views and interview transcripts (parents, teachers and children) employed in this chapter are engaged here to illustrate the totalisation nature of transition to school and how the *surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation and regulation* mechanisms are employed unintentionally and intentionally to destroy or erode children's liberty. Yet, the reader should be aware that Chapter Six illustrates the complexity of power relations in the school setting and therefore, I would ask the reader to remember when reading Chapter Five that Foucault (1977) also argued that in totalisation processes, incommensurability, difference and fragmentation continue to exist (Panneerselvam, 2000). In this sense Chapter Five sets up the common

power relations encountered in the study, whereas, Chapter Six discusses the complex power relations, including children's resistance.

## 5.1 Surveillance

Surveillance is defined by Gore (1995) as 'supervising, closely observing, watching, threatening to watch or expecting to be watched' (Gore, 1995: 169). My first experience of the school helped me understand that surveillance as a mechanism was a socialised and embedded phenomenon of school life; and that surveillance resulted from the complex iterations between individuals:

*As I entered the school, days into the first semester, I felt full of doubt and uncertainty. I was particularly concerned about how my presence would impact on the children. Would the children view me as a spy? I was aware that my being in the school was at the discretion of the head teacher. I wondered had the head teacher consulted the other staff about me, or had they been told to accept me? I had no answers to my questions. This left me feeling apprehensive and somewhat powerless. This powerlessness I realised came from immortal fears of being a school child.*

*Mixed emotions engulfed me as I pressed the school buzzer. A voice at the other end enquired who I was. I said my name and the door buzzed and I was allowed entry. The school administrator was the first person I saw. She did not smile or greet me warmly. Instead she explained that the Primary One children would soon be going into the hall. I was instructed to go there. The administrator leaned over an open window and pointed to the hall. I walked toward the hall, looking over my shoulder for guidance that I was heading in the right direction, but the administrator had disappeared back into her 'enclosure'. Despite her disappearance I continued to feel I was under constant scrutiny. (Field notes, August 2012)*

The see through 'enclosure' that the administrator occupied gave her the illusion of authority (O'Farrell, 2005). From the administrators physical location she appeared to me omniscient and visible, but out of reach. Her aloofness was evocative of the centrally-planned prisons of the 19th century. The most famous example of these is Bentham's Panopticon (Semple, 2003), a design in which a central guard tower is encircled by many storeys of prison cells, so that prisoners are forced to modulate their behaviour, despite not being able to see inside the guard tower.

Foucault argues this is ‘the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power’ (Foucault, 1977:201).

In the above data example, I would argue that power relations were not fluid as the administrator had the power to admit me to the school or not and also to engage in professional discourse or not. I also responded to the administrator in a submissive manner, which did not appear to surprise her. The enclosure occupied by the administrator has clear correlations with other institutions in which discipline and power are seen to be of fundamental importance and where this type of architectural device may be used to passively enforce discipline (e.g., prisons).

From this position the administrator can see all, but is also seen. The administrator is often the first filter through which admittance into the school is permitted, creating an initial impression of control and authority. The administrator appeared to need to conduct a personal persona that suppressed and prevented skills such as inter-relational sensitivity, generosity and compassion; this led to an overall lack of an equitable approach to people visiting the institution. Equity and its association with professionals in schools are amongst Davis’s (2013) writings. He argues:

Sometimes the idea of equity...can be a difficult idea for professionals to grasp, particularly those who have connected their professional identity to tick boxes, to play by the rules and to use notions of neutrality as a veil from which to avoid engaging with the politics of their own decision-making (Davis, 2013:9).

Davis’s (2013) writing on equity has been influential amongst educationalists, as he challenges professionals using traditional methods in schools. His notion on ‘neutrality as a veil’ fits the administrator perfectly. She refrained from any attempt to combine warmth with a welcoming attitude. She merely performed the necessary administrative task.

In earlier work, Davis et al., (2008) noted the amount communicated through an institution’s entrance procedures. Writing in his field notes he admitted: ‘I found my admission into the school quite a frightening experience...’ (Davis et al., 2008: 208). This subjective response alludes to a conflict of desired outcomes, in which an area

designed to welcome children into a learning environment is arranged in such a way that it makes other visitors anxious to cross its border. The reader might ask what effect this is having on those entering the school system for the first time.

In a similar way to Davis (2008), I too found entering the school institution frightening; yet the administrator, a key spatial figure, could have easily reduced my fear by a warm greeting. Nonetheless, according to Foucault (1977), this type of surveillance fulfils its requirements, as I was aware of being under scrutiny. This rendered me vulnerable to self-control – I planned to do exactly as I was instructed to do.

Surveillance was frequently present in my interviews and observations and below I highlight some examples where I found other instances of surveillance in the schools I researched.

One of the schools I visited featured a small, rectangular playground, hard-landscaped in poured concrete, bordered by a chain-link fence. The fence outlined the specific zones where children could spend their time and limited their space. There were no resources for the children to play with. This, again, evoked an architectural device used in prisons, that of the ‘Yard’. This playground merely served as a plateau on which children could escape the tacit surveillance of the school’s interior, to the more implicit surveillance of the school’s exterior:

*I was invited out into the playground today. I found myself to be very popular. Many children were keen to hold my hand and chat with me. There were other adults in the playground, pupil support assistants (known as PSAs). They did not engage with the children unless it was to give an order, i.e., stay on the paving stones, no pushing, no chasing etc. One supervisor did not vocalise her request, she simply looked at the child, pointed to a piece of litter and then indicated to the bin. The offending child was then expected to pick up the litter (dropped by him?) and put the dropped litter into the bin... A girl I had never met before (perhaps from the other Primary One class?) came up to me, laid her head on my thigh and said ‘I am going to be good today.’ (Field notes, August 2012-Westfield School).*

*The children began to enter the classroom. They had been outside for morning break. The PSA was close behind them. He announced loudly to the teacher. ‘No one had to go on the spot today.’ The teacher responded positively. One child tried to say the name of the*



*child who was on the spot. The PSA quickly responded by saying, 'We do not need to know!' admonishing the child (I later discovered there is a time out spot painted on the playground tarmac) (Field notes, June 2013 –Westfield School).*

In both observations the children were aware of being under surveillance. The playground supervisor's non-verbal indication of inappropriate behaviour confirmed that the playing children were never hidden from the watchful eye of the surveying adult, and an overall expectation that children would be obstreperous. This indicated to the children that the 'all seeing' supervisors had the power to punish any misbehaviour. The persuasiveness of this mechanism was apparent when the (unknown) child came up to me, another adult, and felt the need to tell me that she intended to behave, despite not being questioned or prompted, as if she did not want to disappoint me. This incident is deeply problematic as it calls into question the school's role.

Lodge and Lynch (2002) argue 'If the State requires young people to stay in school then it is imperative that their education is an enabling and enriching experience' (Lodge & Lynch, 2002: 2). School may not have been an enabling or enriching experience for this child. For example, why wasn't she playing and socialising with other children? Was she so worried about the consequences of her behaviour that she could not focus on the things that intrigued and stimulated her? The girl's anxiety at being observed was notable in her actions and expression. This supervision was not solely the province of the playground supervisors, children started monitoring and regulating the behaviour of their peers. Foucault's (1977) notion of *governmentality* can be useful here – the 'conduct of conduct' where children manage themselves and are managed (Rose, 1999).



Figure 20: Toilet Rules

The notion of Foucault's 'governmentality' could also be understood through the highly visible signage throughout the building, written by children for children, and outlining officially unsanctioned behaviour.

The Toilet Rules (*Figure 20*) were posted in the girls' toilet. I contend that the author may not be known to all the children in the school – anyone could have written the sign, resulting in children not knowing who was watching and when. I also considered it unlikely that '5 minutes extra playtime!' would ever be granted due to the logistics of allowing some children five minutes extra and not others.

Progressive educator John Holt warned:

Most children in school fail... they fail to develop more than a tiny part of their tremendous capacity for learning, understanding and creating... Why do they fail? They fail because they are afraid... They are afraid, above all else, of failing, of disappointing or displeasing the many anxious adults around them (Holt, 1964:9).

In the examples of surveillance given above, the children's expressions indicated that they did indeed have a desire to conform in front of adults. Was this a manifestation of fear? It is hard to be certain either way. Holt was convinced that children became frightened in school, desperate to please adults around them, which

not only had long-term detrimental effects on their school life, but also impacted on life outside school (Moore, 2013).

I was also aware that the social control of children at morning break did not allow for the natural exuberance of children and occasional need for unruly behaviour (Hillman, 2006). I contend, therefore, that children navigate transition by pursuing the organisational rules of the school and that children notice, recognise and respond to the expectations of adults during this early point in the transition process. In answer to my fourth research question - *How fluid are the power relations in transition?* - Power relations at this point were not fluid – children co-habited the ideologic landscape of school they were made aware of how they were expected to behave.

However, a different form of surveillance – a more supportive form of surveillance – was found in the following field note:

*The teacher gathered all the children on the carpet at the front of the classroom. She informed the children she would like to know what they did at the weekend. The teacher chose who should go first. She listened to each child's story, at times asking questions to elaborate points, or to clarify others. A genuine interest was taken. Most of the children were keen to take part, while others were a little reticent. All the children were engaged, patiently waiting their turn. All were encouraged to participate.' (Field notes, May 2013 – Southfield School)*

‘The gathering of children’ was not approached in a formulaic manner, e.g., the teacher listened to the children rather than order them around - she was more relaxed than other teachers. Here the usefulness of power for enriching the learning process was more perceptible. Whilst not specifically aligned to dispositional outcomes, it was obvious that the teacher was ‘assessing’ the children’s competence to participate and reflect by pulling things out of what children were saying. It is interesting to compare this finding with White (2011a), who argued that ‘...it is essential that dispositions and dialogic skills of inquiry, dialogue and debate are not only nurtured but also modelled’ (White, 2011a: 78). This kind of teaching can be reciprocal, with the teacher learning about the children’s lives (Solomadin & Kurganov, 2009).

Foucault (1977) states: ‘A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it which increases its efficiency.’ (Foucault, 1977:176). Foucault believed surveillance was a necessary part of the professional teaching role, if the teacher was to run a well-organised classroom. Foucault (1988) also added:

Power is not an evil... Let us...take that which has been the object of criticism, often justified: the pedagogical institution. I don't see where evil is in the practice of someone who, in a given game of truth, knowing more than another, tells him what he must do, teaches him, transmits knowledge onto him, communicates skills to him. The problem is rather to know how you are to avoid these practices – where power cannot play and where it is not an evil in itself – the effects of domination which will make a child subject to the arbitrary and useless authority of a teacher, or put a student under the power of an abusively authoritarian professor, and so forth (Foucault, 1988:18).

The decision whether to be authoritarian or not lies in the hand of the adult. In the data example above the teacher employed a listening approach rather than an authoritarian approach to get to know the children. The listening approach, by engaging the children in aesthetic activity, encouraged the formation of a learning and sharing community. Relationships were built through a process that sought to discover what the children's and the teacher's weekend activities and interests were. Bakhtin (1990) defines aesthetic activity as a method of primarily experiencing the life of another by positioning oneself in the place of another through their external act; but always revisiting to the self (outside of the other) to create meaning. In so doing, the teacher and the pupils gained insights into the lives of other children. Gaining insight into the child, according to Foucault (1988), would be seen as an effective role of good teaching practice, as Foucault saw power as both repressive and productive.

Some parents shared their appreciation of their child being under this supportive kind of surveillance:

*From what I can see she [the teacher] rarely has to raise her voice [...] I get the impression she does sometimes I just have a feeling [...] but she seems to be able to manage them with a raised eyebrow. (Parent interview, April 2013 – Southfield School)*

*She is a good teacher because she is strict enough, but she is still kind... she is strict enough to keep the class in check... And I don't hear too many kids talking, I just hear them getting on with what they are supposed to get on with. (Parent interview April 2013 – Westfield School)*

*Teachers see most things, they learn that in teacher school. (Parent interview, October 2013 – Southfield School)*

*They've got eyes in the back of their head. (Parent interview, October 2013 – Eastfield School)*

In light of these comments, I suggest that some parents considered that the teachers' role was to have a 'hard core knowledge base' and uphold the systems in order to ensure smooth-running operation in the classroom (Edwards et al., 2002:51). According to some parents, operating surveillance techniques represented an attempt by the teacher to fulfil the authoritative demands of running a classroom.

I would argue that, like the children, parents too are making transitions to school in the way they view their child and childhood. By valuing the role of the teacher as a surveyor, keeping the child on task represents the commodified view of the child as an adult in training, or as 'human becomings' (Hutchinson & Charlesworth, 2000).

Children within this view 'are constructed as passive beings awaiting their temporal passage into the adult rational world' (Woodrow 1999:10). Sorin and Galloway (2006) suggest that the power of the adult within this construct is to harness the capabilities of the child to suit adult constraints. Adults can be 'tyrannical or loving guides' and the power of the child 'lies in their capacity to learn and participate in a world constructed by adults' (Sorin & Galloway, 2006:21).

However, there are many variations of parental views. Some parents were challenged by a perspective of the adult harnessing the abilities of their child. One parent reported:

*'Well I just feel that everyone knows that something is wrong, but nobody does anything about it... I have put her in a system and I feel I should know better... But I am really struggling like there's no*

*alternative... it appears the majority of the week they are just sitting down in a classroom for six hours. Learning to read and write [said with emphasis]. Bella is so vibrant and so full of passion for dance and making things and she did come home in the first couple of weeks and say 'Why can't I make a crown at school?' And I didn't have a good answer... they have worksheets to do at home, so they are not only doing it during the day she is coming home with homework to do...' (Parent interview, October 2013 – Northfield School).*

This parent viewed her child as agentic – capable and competent (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Wyness, 2000; Thomas, 2002; Danby & Farrell, 2004; Cocks, 2006). Within this construct power is negotiated and shared. As Sorin & Galloway (2006:21) explain: 'The adult lends their power, strength and resources with the child rather than imposing on the child' (Sorin & Galloway, 2006:21).

However, this mother also expressed feelings of powerlessness against a system: '*I am really struggling...*' This parent was not saying that current pedagogical practice should be abandoned – what she was questioning was the need to recognise the changing contexts and have a rethink: '*Why can't I make a crown at school? And I did not have a good answer.*' This is in line with Yelland and Kilderry (2005), who argue that we need to find new ways of understanding the world in which we live (also Cannella, 2000). According to Punch (2002):

Children are used to having much of their lives dominated by adults, they tend to expect adults' power over them and they are not used to being treated as equals by adults (Punch, 2002: 325).

Punch (2002) may not be wrong; however, some children believed being under surveillance benefited them:

*The teachers are usually stricter in school than nursery because you have to accomplish your work in the permitted amount of time if not sooner... I like it that way because it gives you a bit of a challenge (Cloud-Ace, six years, June 2013 – Northfield School).*

While others would prefer more freedom:

*'Well when I was moving on from nursery to school I was excited and after a few days I was still excited, but then I started to miss nursery, because nursery could be a bit more free...' (Me Me, six years – Eastfield School).*

I concluded that children and adults held a variety of views concerning surveillance. In general, surveillance techniques were operated in a rigid fashion, but children and parents views varied on whether this was a good or bad thing or simply – just the way it is. Some children were under the illusion that certain teachers could see everything continuously and had concerns about how non-compliance (e.g. with writing) might affect their future transition:

*'And... and... em because, because if you don't do it [writing] neatly you don't get to go into a different class like... like... like if you do that 10 or 20 times you have to stay in class up to next year (said with emphasis) for the rest of the year,' explained William.*

*'Did the teacher say that to you?' I asked.*

*'We just knew...' replied William. (Child interview with William, five years, April 2013 – Northfield School)*

William 'just knew' the 'all seeing' teacher would know if he did not do neat writing, and that one must be constantly on one's best behaviour (Henrick, 1997; Lawrance, 2010). Through his somewhat fear-induced hesitation, William argued that the thought of being under surveillance had had a normalising effect – he wanted to do neat writing in order to progress to the next classroom with his peers. William's example reminds us that having to follow the teachers' directions is strongly associated with children's adjustment to school (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007).

One interpretation of William's example is that by being compliant, following instructions and school conventions, children think they will make the necessary adjustments that enable progression and future transition.

William's example, by highlighting the teacher's *perceived omniscience*, also alludes to the Panopticon. To William the positive aspect of self-regulation and

surveillance in schools is that he can prevent future problems with transition. This at first hand demonstrated a difference between myself and William as I initially read this example as a case of teachers being restrictive and instilling fear. I concluded for this thesis that administrative or controlling surveillance, even when it instilled fear and even when I find it uncomfortable, is a part of school life that both children and parents expect and learn to accept.

I concluded that benign surveillance is the key driver in a culture of positive conformity and good behaviour.

Surveillance at school differed from surveillance at *Lilybank*. At school, children were almost always under the watchful eye of the adult. The classrooms were either open plan or enclosed. The exception to being constantly surveyed was when the children needed to use the toilet – although permission had to be granted first and the teacher was aware of how long a child was away. If the children were away too long the Pupil Support Assistant was sent to find out why. In one school an adult always accompanied the child to the toilet. However, in *Lilybank* surveillance was less constant, children were free to move throughout the building and garden; there were also areas where children could go to be alone or with peers. Whilst the adults knew where the children were, they were not always under constant scrutiny.

I would argue that power in *Lilybank* was transferred to the children but that the children may have had an awareness of occasionally being watched, which resulted in them unconsciously regulating themselves. This self-regulation, according to Foucault (1977), would come from the uncertainty of knowing when they were being watched. Power, argued Foucault, becomes internalised.

However, another interpretation of the approach at *Lilybank* could come from Sorin (2005), who would argue that when children are considered dialogic partners/social actors, they co-construct with adults (Sorin, 2005) and power is shared (Woodrow, 1999).

The approach at *Lilybank* can be connected to research that argues power relationships, between children and children and between children and adults, can be both transgressive and transformative (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). Staff at *Lilybank* argued that by viewing children as transformative the learning space could be provocative and could alter children's perceptions that they were 'being watched'.



Staff at *Lilybank* argued that they approached children as trusted contributors to the context.

In contrast, at school, children's opportunity to self-regulate increased as they learned the rules (Bernstein, 1996) and how they were expected to behave. Some parents argued that the children needed to conform to the rules of the school:

*'She has been learning the... I know it sounds bad, but to follow a regime... you know follow instructions, like stay in the line...'* (Parental interview, November 2012 – Southfield School).

*'And I guess in practice there does need to be some order (laughs). I think these things need to be adhered to. It is part of their education as well.'* (Parental interview, June 2013 – Westfield School).

The need for conformity highlights the interesting phenomenon that power, when in the hands of the teacher or staff member, might rapidly decrease over time, concurrent with a child's ability to learn the norms of the institution.

Foucault connects surveillance mechanisms to self-regulation and there was no doubt in the minds of respondents that increased self-regulation leads to greater child autonomy and less adult control. However, *Lilybank's* approach suggests that increased child-autonomy and self-regulation was related to less adult control. Ironically both contradictory perspectives end up in the same place – less adult control. This finding – enabled me to better understand the tensions between thinking and practice in the different settings of the study and to recognise how the same curriculum could be employed to justify opposing pedagogy (child freedom v child control). Thus it is possible to answer my third research question - *How do children navigate the complexities of transition?* - By stating that all children were aware of the contrasting pedagogy adopted by different staff and settings and some children complied with authoritarian pedagogies more than others.

Foucault (1977) argues the surveyor does not hold the power – but that power is exercised simultaneously, and then becomes internalised. Foucault's conception of 'power' differs from the often synonymous idea of 'authority'. The children at *Lilybank* were holders of power, in that they exercised self-regulation, relative freedom and self-awareness. The children in schools settings have wait to become holders of power and adults, to different extents, seek to control this process.

However, it is undoubtedly the adult that holds the *authority* in all contexts. And far from being ‘fluid’, I would argue that the dynamic of power is ‘rationed’. The holder of authority, and thus the distributor of power in this context, is undoubtedly the adult. Whilst the child’s power was indeed in flux, this dynamic was entirely controlled by the adult.

In this section, I have utilised notions of the Panopticon to explain how surveillance operated in the different settings of the study. However, it should be noted that there is a difference between Panopticon effects in relation to surveillance and those that breed normalisation. Normalisation refers to the way that social actors are expected to conform and how specific ways of being are internalised. Foucault (1977) argued that norms and expectations were conveyed are hidden in every day discourse. He differentiates between the visual Panopticon and the allegorical Panopticon (hidden values that have a normalising impact). The next section considers how children operated enforced self-regulation within discourse e.g. telling each other how they should sit and write. It argues that the teacher is not only an omniscience authority figure as a result of their ability to operate mechanisms of visual surveillance but also due to their ability to influence the messages in children’s discourse (ways of being, thinking and talking).

## 5.2 Normalisation

...the primary object of normalisation is a group, a population – usually the entire population. The aim is to create the power of the norm, to, via the penalty of the norm, create ‘standardisation’, ‘homogeneity’...A population is normalised to the extent it is brought to behave according to the relevant internally differentiated norm (Young, 2014:201).

In this view, normalisation is to make everyone the same. However, this sameness can be either positive or negative. Sameness in terms of legal rights is the ideal environment of the modern democracy. But enforced sameness, disregarding personal identity or individual motives forms the basis of many a dystopian novel. Linked to this idea, Gore adds that normalisation includes ‘...invoking, requiring, setting or conforming to a standard – defining the normal’ (Gore, 1995: 171).

Lodge and Lynch (2002) argue that schooling is ‘normalised as a social practice’ (Lodge & Lynch, 2002: 2). In what sense, then, does the school normalise? From my observations, it happens in four ways.

- **Normalisation seeks to ensure that all children in the school behave in a similar way to other children, e.g. ‘Primary 1b can you show me good sitting, good listening and good looking’ (Field notes, September, 2012 – Eastfield School). (Instructions as such can deceive teachers into thinking these social practices are essentially liberating, therefore teachers too are being normalised through those instructions).**
- **Institutional procedures, such as testing and assessing the children, perpetuates awareness among them of being examined. Consequently, this normalisation affects how they view themselves and others (Holligan, 1999).**
- **Children are normalised within the procedures of the school. For example, they comply with the school rhythms and the imposed spatio-temporal constraints. The children then become part of the social order and are subsequently programmable and teachable.**
- **If the child does not behave in ‘normal’ ways, then the behaviour is viewed as ‘abnormal’ and must then become subject to some form of deterrent to correct it. This normalises both the individual and also acts as a warning or deterrent to normalise the population as a whole.**

Therefore, in order to *navigate the complexity of transitions*, most children become ‘normalised’. However, should the child think radically in different terms to that of another child, he is likely to receive a deterrent to prevent him doing so again:

*...a child crawled under the table to get to his seat at the other side. He is told on by another child. The teacher responded by saying: ‘You are the one who tells me he has sore knees... your knees will be sore if you don’t look after them.’ (Field notes, August 2013 – Westfield School).*

The normal behaviour expected from the child was to walk around the table to take his seat. The child who observed his peer’s behaviour thought it was

unacceptable and told the teacher. The ‘telling’ by the other child is what Foucault (1977) meant by the ‘society of surveillance’ – when everyone within a society understands the normative ways to behave within it. The ‘telling’ child judged his peer’s behaviour in terms of the standards that had been constructed in the classroom. The teacher provoked thought in the offending child by noting the negative consequences of his action. This chastisement was intended to normalise the child’s future behaviour.

Foucault’s (1977) argument is not that normalisation was unnecessary in all circumstances – he argued that normalisation is, at times, an essential part of the institution. Foucault’s concern was that normalisation killed creativity. In the above example, it could be argued that the child was creatively using a strategy to get into his seat. However, it is unlikely that he will repeat this performance, otherwise he will knowingly do something he should not do. Normalisation or ‘normalising judgement’ was significant to how power operated. Foucault showed that people may be ‘oppressed and dominated through standard ways of talking that served to normalise certain practices and marginalise others’ (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004: 71). I discovered class teachers often transmitted normative expectations onto the children by interjecting their own beliefs into the children’s discourse:

*‘I want to see good numbers today.’ (Field notes, August 2012 – Eastfield School).*

When the teacher said this, no child questioned what good numbers were. Some writers would argue there was an uncritical acceptance by the children that the teacher was the holder of knowledge (e.g., Nassaji & Wells, 2000). To the children, the teacher had an understanding of good numbers – she projected a standard way to do numbers. At this early point in the children’s transition, they were forced to accept the teacher’s perspective or expect public ridicule.

Although in flux, the teacher in this context withholds and maintains power through knowledge and authority. The reader will note that one device of maintaining power through knowledge is the denial of interpretation – the assertion that there are ‘good numbers’. This dynamic could be seen as contradictory to the

core aims of the school system, whereby creativity and interpretation should be fostered in lieu of adherence to authority (Davis, et al, 2012).

Often throughout the day the teachers would imply how the children should perform:

*'Good listeners, look at the person who is speaking, as that says you are listening.'* (Field notes, September 2012 – Southfield School).

The impetus of the given instruction was to establish normal ways of being in the classroom. Holligan (1999) states:

Educational institutions are constructed as regimes whose purpose and success is predicated upon making bodies obedient and practically valuable within a particular social formation. Educational regimes, including putative 'child-centred' regimes, best achieve their aims when individuals internalise their values and norms. Successful normalisation produces 'self-controlled bodies' (Holligan 1999:138).

Linked with this, Gallagher (2004) argues that the normalising instructions given by teachers adds to the process of successful teaching. The teachers in all schools used normalising techniques to bring about internal controls in the children which corresponded with external practices, such as encouraging the children to look at the person (often the teacher) who is speaking. I discovered that the teacher would introduce an instruction such as *'Good listeners look at the person...'* and then this instruction would be turned into a question, asking the children 'What do good listeners do?' This would be repeated in the classroom until the children could chant the answer with little consideration.

Great weight was given to children using a quiet voice in the classroom. Manifested in practice was that a quiet voice was preferred to a loud one. Commands to quieten children were repeatedly heard:

*'Zip it, lock it, and put it in your pocket.'* (Field notes, September 2012 – Eastfield School).

*'We have playground voices and classroom voices.'* (Field notes, September 2012 – Northfield School).

Normalising, then, applies to quite specific aspects of a child's physiognomy, down to their writing styles and volume of voice.

However, normalisation and power dynamics do not merely operate at the level of adult and child. The teachers themselves are subject to the authoritative force of their superiors, a chain which extends far beyond the school walls.

*The teacher is working flat out... she has admitted she is not feeling well today and hoped to call the doctor during her break. She spreads herself thin around the children, often saying 'Shhh..' There appears to be a great pressure on how much 'work' the children have to get through each day. A number of worksheets... which go straight into children's home trays as soon as they are completed. The children are often reminded: 'You tell your parents you were doing maths.' A child says, 'My parents ask me what words I have been learning...' The teacher responds by saying: 'You tell your parents you have been learning maths.' Inside I am concerned about how much children are told what to do, in what time and what to do with things they have made... very much the same thing taught to everyone... I am aware that I am feeling concerned for the overworked teacher... it must be difficult to work this stressed... (Field notes, September 2012- Westfield School).*

This example illustrates that the teachers' instructions to normalise children were equally influenced by the expectations of the socio-political infrastructure of the school; where the rationality of normalisation was constructed and applied to all who inhabited the school. White (2011a) argues '...if curriculum is to be considered as both the content of what is to be learned and the way it is to be learned there is always likely to be some element of teacher control' (White, 2011a: 78).

According to Koupal (2012), 'By means of a pervasive strategy based on disciplinary power, involving surveillance and hierarchical observation, teachers normalise themselves in such a way to become accepted and to be objectified' (Koupal, 2012:38). I too found that I automatically governed myself to fit in with the principles of normalisation as I instructed the children to be quieter as they walked through the school. I realised I was adapting to the social constructions of the institution and by conforming to the regulatory techniques, namely normalisation, I was perpetuating the social order.

In class, I observed the teacher using regulatory techniques as she circulated the space, present and mobile, passing normative assessments on children's work. Walking round the classroom was a persuasive mechanism for both fostering conformity and perpetuating a consciousness among the children that they were always being watched and their performance assessed:

*Teacher arrives at the children's table. Cristiano Ronaldo and Philip are writing, the teacher hovers above them. 'I just want to see if what you have written makes sense,' the teacher said. (Field notes June 2013- Westfield School).*

*'Andy that is not good writing. I want better writing than that.'* (Field notes May 2013 – Northfield School).

Gore suggests normalising performance in this way is:

*'...a common feature of pedagogy... upholding norms of behaviour, of attitudes, of knowledge' (Gore, 1995: 172).*

Teachers' expectations of what *they* judged to be normal trickled into the everyday practice of the classroom. Since Andy's handwriting was addressed in front of the whole class, not only did he get to know what was expected of him, so too did his peers. Subsequently they learned, through Andy's admonishment, what was expected. To me, it was highly unlikely that Andy did not intend to do 'good writing'. A more likely explanation was that he thought he was doing what was being asked of him. A theme that presented itself consistently across my observations was that children aimed to do what was expected of them most of the time.

Normalisation mechanisms were also shown through daily actions and activities in less subtle ways:

*Children have coloured dots on their literacy jotters. The teacher informed me that she used red and green dots to motivate children to achieve their targets. The jotters were displayed on a bookcase at the entrance of the classroom for all to see. (Field notes, May 2012 – Westfield School).*

Here, the teacher exercised her power and shared her normative expectations of what the children should have achieved in the area of literacy. This way of exhibiting children's work, their achievements and their goals were viewed by the teacher as a strategy of good practice. Children were persuaded to take responsibility for themselves and improve their standards according to the normative expectations. Making the assumption that children knew how to reach the higher standard, there is naivety about this ideal. Some children, as in the case of Andy above, were doing their best to reach the expectations.

In the following example, the children were surveyed and normalised, by what Foucault (1977) termed the 'normalising gaze'.

*Both Primary One classes had joined up. Fifty-six young children were seated on the floor. The children were expected to watch a number programme on a small portable television. The programme was to support the children's knowledge of the number '6'. The teacher sat with her back to the children, but every now and then she would turn to look at them, sometimes indicating they should be quiet (by shhh noises) and other times she would turn fast on her seat and stare, somewhat aggressively, at offending children. (Field notes September, 2012 – Eastfield School).*

Here, the practical exercise of power through normalising mechanisms would seem to be an important principle. That is, unless the teacher could successfully exercise power that reinforced specific norms, such as listening and watching the television, this teaching would not have been purposeful.

I have sought to question the role of power and the dynamics of normalisation at the start of school. Answering my fifth research question - *What happens when children arrive at school?* - Power is exercised to bring the children into being, to change them, to make them different to what they were. In this way the teachers in my study mainly, ignored Kurganov (2009)'s view that pedagogical entry lives in the act of teachers understanding the child. Teachers, perhaps, unwittingly perpetuate techniques that are an obstacle to learning. So whilst Foucault (1977) argues that there are legitimate occasions for normalisation mechanisms to operate, what he does not argue is that other alternatives may be possible, such as dialogic approaches.



I would argue that, in most of my observations, the use of normalisation techniques contradicts much of what is beneficial to a child's learning and fosters a culture of conformity and the creation of homogenous children (Davis et al., 2012). The children in my study gave the appearance of adapting integral components of power and domination, doing precisely what was being asked of them by the adult. However, I am also cognisant of the findings that children and teachers alike are normalised and teachers have a 'heavy accountability to the state' (White 2011a: 77).

Connected to techniques of normalisation were techniques of exclusion. Next I will explore exclusion. Exclusion was a tool that I often witnessed during my research phase. The following section deals primarily with this technique and argues the ways in which it could be detrimental to the wellbeing and/or progress of the child.

### 5.3 Exclusion

Exclusion affects children who exist on the margins of school life – those who did not fit into traditional approaches, systems and structures of mainstream education. Foucault (1977) implied exclusion was a mechanism for outlining the limits that marked difference and defined boundaries.

One of the main criticisms of Foucault is that, whilst he was clear in his views on exclusion as a mechanism, he did not interfere with power relations that were intimately involved in the process. Foucault argued that people self-regulated themselves through their relationships with others and that power became internalised, resulting in people exercising power upon them.

In the following vignette, my behaviour differs from Foucault's purely observational approach in that I was forced to affect the power dynamic concerning a child. And here I was reminded of how Leithwood and Poplin (1992) talk of 'consensual' and 'facilitative' power, where power is manifested *through* people and not *over* people.

*Charlie's classroom was, like many new schools, open-plan – meaning that circulation space was integrated within the functional space. Meeting his teacher, Mrs Rain, for the first time, I identified myself and explained the project I had undertaken. Unexpectedly,*

*the teacher reacted with hostility toward my presence, perhaps nervous that she was being monitored, or harbouring some insecurity about her teaching style, although this is conjectural. 'We don't want you here... he doesn't need an educational psychologist,' she said. I smiled, and explained there had been a misunderstanding; I reiterated who I was and my purpose for being there. 'We don't want you here... the parents don't want you here... he doesn't need an educational psychologist,' was the response I received. After leaving and explaining to the administrator what had happened, I was met with an apathetic shrug (Field notes September 2012 – Northfield School).*

Openly acknowledging the tensions between Charlie's teacher and myself, and aware of my own humanity, my own vulnerability, I had to quickly come to terms with being 'shut out', 'asked to leave', 'rejected'. During this emotional personal experience, I was reminded of an old Maslow quotation, 'there is no substitute for experience' (Maslow, 1966: 45). It can be difficult to reveal personal fragility. However, no matter how I felt at that moment, I could not detach my painful feelings of rejection from what I now needed to do. Reluctantly, and while I felt swamped by the enormity of the task, I realised I could not walk away. I had to use this experience as a springboard for discovery and insight (Finlay, 2002):

*I went to leave, then turned back and told the administrator that I would like to speak to someone more senior. The administrator looked at me, with little enthusiasm...she then said 'Wait there,' and pointed to the seating area in the reception hall. Twenty minutes passed. Led by the administrator, I headed to the office of the deputy head teacher, passing en route Mrs Rain, who had ostensibly finished briefing the deputy of our confusing debacle. I explained who had agreed to my doing research, and what had happened today. She responded wearily, yawning, and explained that there had been a lot of changes, that the head teacher who had organised the research was no longer there, and that the deputy head herself was a temporary secondment.*

*When it came to discussing Mrs Rain's response to me, she asked 'Was she anxious?' I explained I did not know, I had never met Mrs Rain before. The deputy head responded by saying 'You must know what anxiety looks like.' I could not help feeling that this whole experience was totally unexpected. The deputy head suggested that according to Mrs Rain, Charlie's parents did not want me there. I explained that this could not be the case as Charlie's parents had been constantly in touch enquiring when the research was likely to*

*start. They were very keen. The deputy head said she would call them and suggested we put in another date. The deputy head began speaking about Charlie's mother, making judgments about her being fretful, etc. I explained that had never been my experience... (Field notes, September 2012 – Northfield School).*

Although subjective, this experience reinforces the point that exclusion and disciplinary processes which happen in schools do not simply affect children, parents and staff, but also other professionals (Davis, 2008). It would have been easier for me, in one sense, to leave. However, leaving would have meant that I was then acknowledging the given truth that teachers are all-powerful, reinforcing the notion that teachers were '...privileged by means of power, position, tradition and so forth' (Cherryholmes, 1998: 61).

As a researcher I had much to consider – the children, the parents, the research itself. These power relations could not go unchallenged. Everything, my feelings included, had to be put aside. I could not walk away and let exclusion be used as a means of power. As explained above, I returned to the school, and consequently carried on with the research. It was here I considered that we are all active agents forming ourselves (Foucault & Kitzman, 1998).

Foucault (1977) viewed the Panopticon as a laboratory, as a machine to conduct experiments. Its purpose was to modify behaviour, to instruct individuals, to educate using different techniques, to try out different teaching experiments and specifically to focus once again on the much-debated effects of secluded education. This school was a different kind of laboratory and I had to consider that my persistence in returning and seeking out answers may have altered behaviours and challenged power relations within the school. Foucault (1974) argued:

The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the working of institutions which appear to be neutral and independent...so that we can fight fear (Foucault, 1974: 171).

How does anyone fight the school institution? According to researchers, children do reflect on the arbitrary rules (Scarlett, 1988) and the discipline procedures (Lewis & Lovegrove, 1987), however, children who go against the rules and regulations are

likely to be repressed, oppressed or ignored. This forces some children to conform or to accept the consequences of their deviance. One example of this can be found here:

*'Two boys in the classroom, they are friends, they are always naughty and they are the biggest boys in the class. The teacher, we were learning, said "Outside!" [said loudly]. And it was Christmas that time...'* (Field notes, June 2013 – Westfield School).

As expressed by four-year-old Clary, I too discovered that children were often subjected to exclusionary and disciplinary practices – ostracised and separated from their classmates for misdemeanours. This act of segregation can be an efficient tool for the teacher. However, what often goes unnoticed by a busy teacher is the length of time that the offending child was excluded from the class, learning nothing and unmotivated to improve. More often than not, if a child was excluded they rarely returned to the morning or afternoon session, but were segregated until break or home time.

For Foucault (1981), the concept of exclusion functions spatially in all institutions. He argued:

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role it is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality (Foucault, 1981: 210).

In the following example, five-year-old Philip explained how children could be excluded for specific periods of time. From Philip's description, the notion of exclusion functioned spatially (Foucault, 1981). For example, children were removed from the classroom to a zone of exclusion within the institution, or excluded to a space in the playground where they were segregated from other children:

*...they [children] need to have time out. So there is some froggies, and if you are bad you go to five minutes of time out, so your frog moves onto the lily pad and it stays there forever and if it is worse it is 15, it only goes to 20. That is a long time... if you are outside, it is*

*on the blue square for five minutes and it works the same way inside and out (Child interview, August 2013 – Westfield School).*

What Philip expressed was a specific mechanism of time out. This differed from the more spontaneous example given above where the child was excluded and time was forgotten. In Philip's example, timing was very specifically allocated to particular misdemeanours, and the time allocated per misdemeanour was known only to the teacher. None of the children were sure to escape exclusion on a day to day basis. Giving children allocated time out meant that their behaviour was expected to be corrected before they were readmitted to the society as normalised children. According to Peters and Besley (2014), 'We are moving towards a new kind of society, historically the most monitored and observed democratic society that has ever been' (Peters & Besley, 2014:103). And as James and James contend:

*...above all the knowledge they acquire in the classroom, children learn their social place via the class inequalities perpetuated in the educational codes through which schooling is encrypted (James & James, 2004:117).*

Certainly, the children were very aware of being under continual surveillance. As Philip explained, should they step out of line it was understood that they would be excluded, the end point of which is normalising judgement. Interestingly, when I went into homes to interview parents, some were not aware that their child had been excluded during the lesson. All the parents knew about the exclusion system but passed comment that this happened to other children. Only one parent noted that her daughter, Lily, had been excluded:

*She is quite strong-willed which is why she is on the cloud and others never are, because when she has got something on her mind she will just say it (laughs) which does not help with the teachers. [Name of teacher] is more strict than [previous teacher] but again I think he is new and finding his feet... (Parent interview, October 2013 – Southfield School).*

The above example illustrates that if children are passive recipients, subordinated to adult control rather than active agents, there is less chance of being excluded. Thornberg (2008) argues that children are ‘regimented and involuntarily subjected to mass routines, discipline and control’ (Thornberg, 2008: 418 *also* Alderson, 1999). In his study *It’s Not Fair – Voicing Pupils’ Criticisms of School Rules*, Thornberg (2008) discovered that children identified school rules and teachers’ inventions as ‘unfair’ and ‘inconsistent’.

According to Corsaro (1997), children do not simply internalise their social world but endeavour to make sense of it and participate in it. However, for Lily, participating resulted in her being disciplined and excluded. Lily was, more or less, expected to sit unquestioning and obedient. This results in children being fostered to be uncritical rule-followers as opposed to active agents (James et al., 2001; Sorin & Galloway, 2006; Tisdall et al., 2009; Tisdall & Punch, 2012). This is inconsistent with current legislation on children’s rights (The Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2015). Besag and Nelson (1984) also put forward the idea that the school rewards or punishes children for the level of compliance to its values, ideals, rules and regulations. One such punishment is exclusion.

In answer to my third research question - *How do children navigate the complexity of transitions?* - children soon learn that the school produces social control. Children learn what is expected and not expected – some children learn this faster than others (James et al., 2001). In answer to my fourth research question - *How fluid are the power relations in transition?* - There are taken-for-granted assumptions that power lies with adults (Denscombe, 1985; Alderson, 1999; James et al., 2001). School rules and disciplinary punishments, such as exclusion, are not negotiated and agreed with children – children are then subordinated to adult control (Thornberg, 2008). In answer to my fifth research question - *What happens when children arrive at school?* - Children and teachers learn to understand the power that exists between them (Denscombe, 1985). In the above example, Lily was learning that ‘*when she has got something on her mind*’ and she says it, there are likely to be repercussions. Her parents confirmed this. This may result in Lily participating less in class.

In the following example, a parent helper shared her experience of child who was unable to speak English. Despite marked inequalities, the child was not included, but excluded from the majority of the class and from the small support group that the parent helper had responsibility for:

*...she has [the teacher] got a child for whom English is a second language. Well the child does not speak a word of English and that is very difficult as well, because this poor girl... she must have started the week before, I asked the teacher if she was to join in the group I am doing and the teacher said 'No, she'll just draw' and I thought 'oh, ok,'... (Parent interview, November 2012 – Westfield School).*

Here, the teacher gave English-speaking children privilege at the expense of those who did not speak English. Rather than promoting inclusivity, and viewing cultural and linguistic diversity as individual and societal resources, the child experienced exclusion. Cummins (2004) claims that 'xenophobic discourse is broadcast into every classroom and constitutes the primary means through which coercive relations of power are enacted' (Cummins, 2004:4). It did appear that adult instruction was intended for the many, not the few, as the child who did not *fit* was excluded from any teaching. In ostracising the child, it is difficult to see how exclusion was beneficial to her learning. The child may have no choice but to become assimilated into the predominant local culture.

The action not to include is manifestly against national policy and this '...reproduces relations of domination and subordinacy through various school practices' (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993:150). Cummins (2004) suggests that the way forward is for teachers to educate the whole child rather than just teach the curriculum, arguing that in a 'culturally and diverse context it is necessary to nurture intellect and identity equally in ways that, of necessity, challenge coercive relations of power' (Cummins, 2004: 6).

In Scotland, children with English as an additional language (EAL) are immersed into classrooms with English-speaking children. Education Scotland suggests that teachers should engage and support the social and linguistic development of all children, and that EAL children should have opportunities to use their first language in order to learn. It is acknowledged that:

EAL learners may need additional support in order to access routines, activities and equipment...and all practitioners in the setting receive training on EAL and equality and diversity. EAL learners are not a homogenous group. In the same way as any other learner, they may require support from other agencies, such as psychological, health and social services (Education Scotland, 2015).

In agreement with Education Scotland, Dockett & Perry (2005) and Sanagavarapu & Perry (2005) argue that recognising, respecting and responding to cultural and linguistic diversity underpins effective transition. Education Scotland identifies the potential facilitative role of the teacher, or parent helper, which may enable active engagement.

However, the data showed the teacher was not inclined to include the child, despite the suggestion from the parent helper. The parent reported that the classroom was very busy and this contributed to the child being excluded from the beneficial social and educational experiences offered to the other, English-speaking, children. This example, according to Crenshaw (1995), is an everyday event in schools, where children can be discriminated against, silenced and ignored because of their race.

Further, Delgado and Stefanić (2012) claim this is an example of ‘micro-aggression’, as the child is subjected to a dispiriting experience. These small acts can perpetuate the exclusion mechanism and consequentially become part of the culture of the school if left unchallenged. White (2011a) asks the important question: ‘*How can teachers work dialogically with families to ensure that cultures, and individuals within them, are not completely consummated by the culture of the institution?*’ (White, 2011a:81). I would suggest that taking time to form relationships with children and families is key to understanding them and we need to find new ways of understanding the world in which we live (Cannella, 2000; Yelland & Kilderry, 2005; White, 2016). As Cummins (2004) stressed, this would include teaching the whole child and not a pre-set curriculum.

In the following example, power and knowledge are manufactured in a curriculum which is norm-referenced, deficit-driven, and which excludes Sweetie:



*I am more surprised that she was a little bit slow with the numbers... I don't know what level they are expecting and I don't know what they mean when they say she is a little bit slow... she needs to speed up that is the thing... um... I was also reading that children are exposed to more than one language, which research says they can be a little bit slow to the other children, but that may be the case... the other thing is she won't speak up in class, I think in part she may be shy or, um, I dunno what else it could be, but [dad] is working on that. We are trying to explain to her why she should speak louder or be more confident... (Parent interview, May 2013 – Eastfield School).*

Exclusion here resulted from the normative expectation of what mathematical ability a child is expected to have achieved in Primary One. Mathematics is categorised as a key subject in the Scottish curriculum (Education Scotland, 2015: no pagination) and it becomes a complex problem if a child does not succeed in this fundamental area, the complexity being attributed to resources. If Sweety is viewed as needing extra support, a Pupil Support Assistant will have to be recruited to carry out early intervention strategies, to bring Sweety to the 'normal' level. Here, the family were affected by the standards set by the school, and consequently the highly-ritualised use of power.

My research has indicated that, whilst exclusion as a disciplinary or effort-reducing tool differed in frequency between schools, it existed in all of them. Exclusion was observed daily in the classroom, where children were expected to remember the daily rhythms and procedures. For example, children were directed to collect their snack from their tray and line up at the door. When all of them had done this they could collect their coats and go out into the playground. At this time the teacher also went for a break. As teachers often work in isolation, this may have been the only time of day in which she could have collegial conversations with her peers (Dussault et al., 1999) – this time is precious. Should a child need more time, he or she is singled out.

*'You are keeping everyone waiting.'* – Teacher (Field notes, September 2012 – Westfield School).

The exclusion mechanisms were persuasive – often they not only impacted on the child being excluded, but also affected members of the child's peer group.

The children had already, despite their inexperience, formed understanding of how power operated in the school. William described how the exclusion mechanism worked, and thus how power operated:

*'Does your school have the sunshine and two clouds?' I asked.*

*William replied, 'No they have four clouds...okay, okay this might be a little hard to explain, but if you get on the first cloud you lose five minutes of Golden Time, if you go on the second cloud you lose 10 minutes of Golden Time, if you go on the third cloud you lose 15 minutes of Golden Time and if you go on the fourth cloud you lose 20 minutes of Golden Time.'* (William, five years, April 2013 – Northfield School).

In the following example, one child told her parent how concerned she was about the exclusion mechanisms used:

*She found, and continues to find, the sun/cloud difficult. It appears to her as a constant visual threat rather than a reward. Whilst she is confident that she will never [said with emphasis] move from the sun, it concerns her when others do. I am concerned that if she was ever moved from the sun she would be disproportionately upset and affected.* (Parent interview, August 2013 – Southfield School).

Here the structure of the disciplinary practice of exclusion marginalised, silenced and oppressed children and recreated the unequal social stratification in the classroom, as the teacher decided who would be excluded for what and when. I discovered that this could sometimes be down to perception:

*When Mrs McKenzie perceived a child to be actively refusing to do a certain task, or avoiding the task through inappropriate behaviours, the child, perceived to be no longer under instructional control was given a punishment. For example, one child was informed 'If you do that again you will have Time Out.' Then a few moments later the child was publicly removed and sat somewhere far from the group. Considering the children had only been Primary One pupils for a very short time, the punishment appeared disproportionate* (Field notes, August 2012 – Westfield School).

This vignette shows how control can be of utmost concern to some teachers and teachers can make decisions in arbitrary ways. If the teacher thought the child was misbehaving, they were excluded, and later coerced into what they should have been doing (Jackson, 2010). Managing behaviour was also subjective and a teacher's prior knowledge of some children influenced a quicker response.

Exclusion is a highly controversial and problematic tool which pervades the Scottish school system today. I would agree with Gallagher (2004), who concluded in his thesis *Producing the Schooled Subject: Techniques of Power in a Primary School*, that it may indeed be difficult to conceive alternative strategies which could be used in a class of up to 30 children and one adult. But I remain of the opinion that the potential negative effects of excluding and isolating children as it is used now have to be challenged in teaching practices if schools are to be seen as active sites where possibilities exist (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993).

In answer to my third research question - *How do children navigate the complexity of transitions?* - children did this by following rules and obeying the organisational principles and institutional procedures. The school's expectation was that, as the children complied with the principles and procedures, they learned to fit in with these rules. Some children appeared to accept the labels appointed and the isolation that came with exclusion. Exclusion generates markers of difference and this is also the case for classification, which will now be discussed.

#### **5.4 Classification**

Classification is a sanction. If you are well classified, there is a reward. But if you are not well classified, there is punishment (Michel Foucault, par lui-meme).

To classify is to place and denominate. Classification, however, is inherently problematic. Often, to put something into a category, or to label it, is to focus on a single property. This is especially true at school, where a child may be put into an academic group, above or below a peer. This group may share little else other than an ability to concentrate in class, mathematical aptitude or linguistic ability.

Ostensibly, to be placed either above or below a certain level in school is to ignore the manifold other qualities a child will possess. One of the formal processes of classifying children can be found in the complex notions of the assessment process, ‘baseline testing’ (Wilkinson et al., 1996; 2001). One head teacher explained the timing:

*‘Baseline tests in literacy and numeracy, these are mandatory. They have to be completed as soon as Primary One children start and should be completed no later than mid-September’ (completed no later than mid-September was emphasised). (Head teacher, January 2015 – Westfield School).*

Teachers who have had little time to get to know the children make inherently subjective judgments about them based on the limited knowledge gained from baseline tests. The head teacher added that conventional institutional teaching involved following a variety of tests:

*‘YARC (York Assessment in Reading and Comprehension) is mandatory. All pupils are presented for this in May of Primary One. PIM (Progress in Maths 5) is mandatory. All pupils are presented for this in May of Primary One. All Primary One and Primary Two pupils in [Name of] council follow the ‘Literacy Rich Programme’ – each unit concludes with a check-up assessment. I would think that all schools use these – although these are not mandatory. Some schools may buy in additional assessments – GL tests (formerly NFER/Nelson) are popular. However, I would consider that most head teachers feel that the above is enough assessment. (Head teacher interview, January 2013 – Westfield School).*

The test results rate children’s achievement against certain uniform standards informed by the discipline of developmental psychology, which according to Dahlberg and Moss (2005), adopts a positivistic-analytic paradigm. The head teacher explained that by ensuring the tests were carried out he was fulfilling his role and abdicating himself of any personal liability.

The results of the testing informed the teacher of which ability groups children were allocated in. These groupings also served to reinforce stereotypes, power differences and how children regarded themselves (Donaldson, 1978; Entwistle,

1998). Furthermore, children, and their parents, ranked children, whether consciously or sub-consciously, into social hierarchical groupings. Separate categorical labels failed to identify differences among individuals (Davis, 2013). Such approaches conflict with existing views of diversity as a resource and children as competent co-contributors to learning (Davis & Watson, 2002 also Dockett & Perry, (2005); Sanagavarapu & Perry, (2005).

Additionally, baseline testing may avoid any need for variation in teaching, as teachers could continue to follow a prescriptive programme. As a result, just weeks after children transition to Primary One, they are subjected to evaluation according to the various rating scales identified above. According to Davis et al., (2012), through the narrow approach of testing, education becomes domesticated and, consequently, denies children the opportunity to think for themselves.

Baseline testing is grounded on Western normative understandings of child development and tests are reliant on traditional developmental stage theories (Connor, 1999). This somewhat impersonal testing procedure, Robinson (2012) contends, is 'rooted in the values and methods of industrialism' (Robinson, 2012: ix). It does not provide children with a critical perception of their social reality – instead testing builds on a set of normative characteristics and expectations.

Whilst baseline testing took place on all four sites, the process differed greatly from school to school. This appeared to be due to the school ethos as opposed to any variation in teaching.

At one site, children were removed from the classroom to be tested (with a promise from the teacher that if they were good, they would get a sticker when they came back), while on another site, children were in the same classroom but with a different adult doing the testing. Instructions also varied – some adults gave detailed instructions while others provided little. The testing process made it possible to mitigate or exacerbate the transition process.

For example, should the child be removed from the room to spend time on their own with the class teacher, it may mitigate the transition process by giving the child one-to-one attention. However, if the child found himself in a classroom with an unknown adult under test conditions, it may have exacerbated the process, as the testing atmosphere could potentially disrupt it.

After the baseline testing, targets were set for each child. To some extent the children were involved in this process, as they set a target for themselves with the teacher (*Figure 21*).

**Personal Learning Planning**

for \_\_\_\_\_  
April - June 2013

Literacy Target  
• to give a short talk to  
the class  
Progress to date ◊ ◊ ◊

Maths Target  
• to make a symmetrical  
picture  
Progress to date ◊ ◊ ◊

Health and Well Being Target  
• to run my fastest on  
Sports Day  
Progress to date ◊ ◊ ◊

Update on hobbies, interests and achievements  
dancing on Tuesday; drama on  
Wednesday

Pupil Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Carer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 21: Example of Personal Learning Planning Targets

The following provides an example of being *well* classified, and receiving a reward. It also illustrates how the process of alienation occurs through classification:

*'It is funny, because the teacher actually commented to me the other day about reading groups and who would be in the groups because they [the children] would practise at home and if they don't practise at home they are not doing so great...and I said 'Really?' And that is probably true.'* (Parent interview, August 2013 – Westfield School).

Classification occurs on more than one level. First of all, the parent is classified as a good parent, who supports the homework procedure and, secondly, his son will be rewarded and be classified by grouping. The teacher has shared assumptions on why

children may not be doing 'great'. Assumptions such as these alienated members of the school community and created an unhelpful blame culture.

Grouping children according to ability happened in all schools. Teaching proceeded through methods such as the categorising of knowledge, and the placing and categorising of individuals and groups:

*But of course they are different... I think the teachers are dealing with it quite well with their different groups. Groups for reading and things. We never had that when I was at school. You were in rows and you had your wee table and we were never put into groups of skill... (Parent interview, October 2013 – Southfield School).*

*A nice wee positive sign is that he has gone into the top reading group... but aye it is nice to hear... not that we are competitive or anything... but he is slightly better at reading than other children... (Parent interview, August 2013 – Westfield School).*

Children were classified and differentiated as a method of knowledge production. They were pupils who had 'done well' if they achieved good results in their tests. This treatment also applied to parents, who were classified as supportive or unsupportive depending on whether they participated or not in homework tasks.

The examples explored here demonstrate that classification is a significant mechanism for teaching. Nevertheless, in its use and formation of specific conceptions of normality, its oppressive despotism was also evident. To have 'achieved' is to have triumphed, according to the school's standards. To have not 'achieved' is to indicate to the teacher that the child is in need of intervention, or 'improved' parenting. As well as knowledge classifications, children were also classified in terms of gender:

*...when Sweetie was in the nursery [Lilybank] she was really happy playing with children I think... with boys... sorry... but in school she's been... because I drop her in the mornings there are a few children... a few boys pushing in the queue she seems not to be happy... and I think she has been mainly socialising with girls. I mean there are many more boys than girls in the class, but even at that they always put just one or two boys in each table. But I think*

*even at that she is not mixing with boys. I think in the school they seem to separate boys and girls... I would like to see her much more confident with the mixing of boys like she used to (Parent interview, December 2012 – Eastfield School).*

*She has no male friends. Because when she was in nursery [Lilybank] she had lots of friends that were boys. And... they tend to play more games and things that are 'girl' or 'boy' games... they do one thing for the boys and one thing for the girls... (Parent interview, May 2013 – Southfield School).*

In the above examples, it could be argued that the school is perpetrating the socio-economic and political inequalities encompassing Western society. Gender roles become naturalised, as argued by Butler (1990; 1997) – polarisation of genders is a social construct and that gender is not something inherent but performed. Butler's work suggests that if schools focused less on gender classification, instead integrating all children, they would become more socially just. I considered that none of the parents of boys complained that their son no longer played with girls.

One possibility may be that, although the boys played with girls in *Lilybank*, the parents now accepted this as the social stratification of the school. This compliance is symptomatic of the inherent characterisation of the schooling system, and alludes to the complicity of well-meaning parents who accept the homogenising force of school in the hope that their child will become 'normal', or 'well-adjusted'. However, this exclusive 'many not the few' categorisation merely threatens to alienate those who do not fit.

The inequalities of categorising children are highlighted in the final example, where a deputy head teacher glibly classified a child:

*On a return visit to the school I met with the deputy head teacher. I enquired how one of the study children was doing. The deputy head responded, 'He is doing fine.' The deputy head then continued to say that the school had invited an educational psychologist to come and see him because 'He hits his friends really badly...kind of Aspergersy.' (Field notes, June 2013 – Northfield School).*

Such a classification could be considered as arbitrary and illegitimate. Transmitting this knowledge was not useful, serving little purpose to any party



involved. It is merely symptomatic of historical misunderstandings of gender and identity, which have not yet had time to adapt to current research and knowledge on the subject.

In answer to my fourth question - *How fluid are power relations in transition?* - my observations confirm that there was little opportunity for children to be involved in participation and decision-making. Consequently, teachers made most of the decisions in the classroom, grouping children hierarchically according to ability and classifying parents as supportive or unsupportive. The teachers categorised parents based on perceived knowledge regarding the ability of their children. Decisions about who sat where and who with were made by the teacher. The power relations reflected the adult view of the incompetent child and the taken-for-granted asymmetry between children and adults in school (Sorin & Galloway, 2006).

Evidently, categorisation was another tool used by the teacher to provide children with the perceived, correct learning environment, that is, peers of similar aptitude. Categorisation, then, is an inherently problematic method. Incorrect or demeaning categorisation is often perceived as punitive – both by pupils and parents – and can lead to negative experiences for the child, harming their future of learning and their regard for school as an edifice of learning. Moreover, it can lead to anxieties in parents, putting extra pressure on very young children to perform and achieve.

Categorisation then, is a way to ‘label’ the child. To categorise and distribute individuals ‘in space’ is another form of categorisation, which I explore and expound upon in the following section.

## **5.5 Distribution**

Distribution, according to Foucault (1980), is associated with bodies in space, ‘arranging, isolating, separating and ranking’ (Gore, 1995: 176). This practice is widespread in schools as teachers are not placed to work directly with other adults (Dussault et al., 1999) and, therefore, use this mechanism to maintain order in the classroom. Distribution is also linked to the separation and arrangement of physical space. In the following examples, the teachers used distribution as an organisational mechanism:

*This morning, similar to other mornings in the primary school, the children began with a literacy lesson. Typically, I have found that every lesson has quite explicit goals for literacy and numeracy. Today the children sat at their tables in their allocated groupings, waiting patiently for the teacher to give them their instructions. Situated on the table was a coloured plastic tray with various magnetic letters. Beside the tray were cards with three letter words, e.g. map, hat, mat etc. – each card had a corresponding image. The children were instructed to take a card with three letters, then match the card to the letters on the magnetic tray, and then make up the word. The children easily achieved this task. Perhaps due to their success, low chatter erupted. The teacher reprimanded the children. ‘Stop and listen to some instructions... next door are managing to do the same activity without using their big playground voices.’*

*The children stopped chattering and waited patiently on their next instruction. ‘Now put your letters in the middle and muddle them up. Now choose a new card.’ This activity continued for approximately 40 minutes. It was now time for the children to move around the room to another experience. The children stood up, moved behind their chairs and then tucked their own chair under the table. Then they waited for the teacher to give them the instruction to move onto the next experience. All the experiences were goal-orientated to support literacy development. Sweety’s group was instructed to go to the Smart board. At the Smart board the children waited on the teacher to tell them what to do and what words to write. The teacher allocated a three letter word to each child, ‘pat’, ‘man’, ‘set’, ‘ant’... the children waited their turn to write out the word they had been allocated (Field notes September 2012-Eastfield School).*

*The children visited the computer suite today. There are 13 computers. Not all the computers are working. Children need to pair up and the teacher selects who each child should partner up with. Children were paired according to who, in the teacher’s opinion, worked well together, and those she was concerned about or who required additional supervision, she kept close by. The children were instructed to use the program ‘Education City’ and the area they had to open up was ‘maths’ (Field notes, June 2013 – Westfield School).*

In the examples of distribution above, the teacher, organised, arranged and isolated the children and power became a natural and integral part of children’s time in school.

Distribution was also obvious in the way resources were allocated, with children being appointed to specific computers. The children (and most likely the teacher)

knew which computers performed best. Additionally, resources such as glue sticks and scissors were allocated by the teacher, rather than children being in a position to collect what they needed when they needed it.

In the following examples, the deputy head and class teachers also used distribution for disciplinary purposes:

*It is sports day today. I am met by the deputy head of the school. She takes me through the school, through the classes of children changing for sports day. The children (of various ages) are in high spirits. We enter one classroom where the children are lined up to go out the door into the playground. Two boys are play-fighting at the end of the line. The deputy head shouted, 'There is no toy fighting in this school, stop it at once.' She separated the boys and ordered them into different areas of the classroom (Field notes, June 2013 – Eastfield School).*

*On returning after break, a boy who was described by the teacher as disruptive made a request to sit with his friend. 'Me and Rory are best friends,' he said. The teacher responded by saying, 'Wait and see.' (Field notes, June 2013 – Westfield School).*

*I spoke to the teacher and said he [Cristiano Ronaldo] might benefit from having a bit of space from Philip. 'Yes,' she said, 'Well, OK.' And the next day she came back and said they had changed tables (Parent interview, November 2012- Westfield School).*

The facility to make these distributional judgements, and the way this was apparent to the pupils, reinforced the power relations between children and teacher. Children were not permitted to choose who they sat or worked beside but instead were assigned to tables according to ability. The reasonable action of children distributing themselves to another table or group would likely be noticed during surveillance and lead to the 'normalising' of children into given groups.

As soon as distributional judgements are constructed according to some individual attribute, such as 'slow in maths', the significance of distribution in terms of influence of power is apparent. The power to control and allocate positions, both academically, spatially and socially within the class, is wholly the teacher's.

In answer to the fourth research question - *How fluid are the power relations in transition?* - *Distribution* mechanisms restrict the fluidity of power relations. Distribution involved the teacher arranging, isolating and ranking the children and

also controlling their verbal and physical behaviour for her own ends. However, it is not certain that this approach was consistently employed for the benefit of the individual child or the class as a whole. Power relations were not fluid, but controlled by an individual. In Chapter Six, I will argue that no social order can ever be absolute there will always be resistance (Falzon, 1998), but resistance has consequences.

Whilst distribution was designed to affect the behaviour of the class collectively, it was inherently a technique centred on the individual. This dualism of the individual versus the collective is at the heart of the politics, power relations and methodologies of the classroom.

## 5.6 Individualisation

The influence a master has over his scholars is very great; the veneration wherewith they regard him is almost equal to idolatry... so much so that they are his willing servants, and doubly proud to be his [a]mbassadors on trivial occasions; his smiles are precious, and even bitter things are sweet, when bestowed by his hand. (Lancaster in O'Malley, 2003:93)

While Joseph Lancaster, an educator, was writing about schooling in 1798, I discovered this type of individualisation and idolatry continued to be evident in 21st century education.

*The teacher became the best person in the world and whatever her teacher said was the right thing. It makes you aware of the power of teachers at this age (Parent interview, October 2013 – Eastfield School).*

*Mrs McKenzie has been given 'God-like' status by Ninja Rock – mum is wrong and Mrs McKenzie is right (Parent interview, December, 2012 – Westfield School).*

Lancaster's educative aim was to support children to know their place in the world as subordinates. He was preparing children for the world of industry, where children would, in order to survive the workplace, need to take orders. However, awarding distinctive disposition to oneself is an everyday technique of power in teaching that can be observed in the classrooms today (MacNaughton, 2005;

O'Farrell, 2005; Jackson, 2010). Whether it is to incite, reinforce, control, monitor or optimise behaviours, will be shown:

*Ninja Rock is drawing at his table. It is a very detailed drawing. He has not added words to his story yet. The teacher walks by and says, 'Ninja Rock, what a lovely drawing. I think you will be an artist.' 'I think, I think, I want to be an artist,' he replies (Field notes, May 2013 – Westfield School).*

*When we went to the consultations she [the teacher] said she had changed him to a higher group and she felt that it was more suitable for him. And she was saying how he is very, very quick with answers (Parent interview, November 2012 – Westfield School).*

*...he is showing his classmates and his teacher who he is. (Parent interview, November 2012 – Northfield School)*

*Yes, well, Cristiano Ronaldo plays football. You already 'fit in' when you play football because it is a universal thing and if you play football you are probably going to be one of the cool ones in the class anyway if you are good at it... so it is kinda in my eyes fitting-in... (Parent interview, August 2013 – Westfield School).*

The specific identification of individual capabilities was optimised here. In the first instance, the child expressed her admiration of her teacher (this information was echoed by all the research children across all four sites). This was likely to be a motivational factor for the child, who was of the belief that her teacher was always right (Nassaji & Wells, 2000). The teacher was in a strong position to exercise her will upon the child. In the second example, as the teacher bestowed a compliment on Ninja Rock – this reinforced his belief in himself about his drawing capabilities, but also alluded to the potential power of the teacher to influence a child's desires and ambitions in the long term.

At *Lilybank* individualisation was employed in connections with notions of children's rights that seek to engage with the individual children's voices and aspirations. It was employed in processes of co-constructed learning that sought to balance the individual and collective aspects of the environment. Individualisation was not associated with regimes of punishment nor promoted staff as 'masters' of the environment. Non-hierarchical techniques and practices of dispersed leadership sought to reduce the totalising impact of adults. The following section provides data

of how the ‘totalising’ mechanism was exercised in school. Early in this chapter I illustrated the potentially ‘totalising’ nature of adult power. It should be noted that I found a difference between notions of totalising power (adult authority) and mechanism totalisation (giving up individual perspectives and controlling ones-self in order to fit into the group). The next section discusses the latter.

## 5.7 Totalisation

*I don't know how much they are allowed to be different. They are made to conform. Slightly different to [Lilybank]. At school they reign them in a bit and if they are slightly different it could be an issue (Parent interview, October, 2012 – Eastfield School).*

Totalisation is a technique used by teachers to govern or regulate groups, and produce knowledge. It is a move from the individual to a ‘collective’ classroom, where ‘I’ becomes ‘we’ and planning is considered for the collective whole. Children had their own predictions that they would become part of the collective whole when they arrived at school, as reflected in this mind-mapping session:

*‘When the adult is reading a story, you need not to speak.’ (Paloma, four years- Lilybank).*

*‘When the teacher tells you to sit down you cross your legs. But the teachers don't actually read the children learn.’ (Me Me, four years – Lily- bank).*

*‘When you are having a story, you have to be very quiet because the children are reading. You read and write.’ (Sweety, four years - Lilybank).*

*‘When we're writing we have to read and cross our legs.’ (Natalie, four years) (Mind-mapping session, 2012 - Lilybank).*

The children in this mind-mapping session were clear that when they arrived at school they would be treated as part of a group. They already understood that the ‘I’ would be the ‘we’. However, for some children being part of ‘we’ was found to be challenging:

*I had to go in at the beginning when they did the testing for the levels... I went in and with a little push we managed to get there in the end. I spoke to the teacher and I said he still feels he is in the nursery and he can still pick and choose what he wants to do and I said she needs not to give him an option... I'd speak to him and say, 'You need to follow the rules, you need to do the stuff, like the structure things'... the parent may agree or not, but the school is what it is, we can't change it (Parent interview, November 2012 – Westfield School).*

Foucault (1982) helps us gain a deeper understanding of totalisation. Totalisation is, on the face of it, an ethical way to behave, where the 'I' considers the 'Other' in an open way. It is an ongoing task, and not an ideal state, where other perspectives are considered that are different to our own. For example, the children above implied an acknowledgement and understanding of the importance of being quiet while other children or teachers were reading. However, my data enables me to challenge Foucault's view that totalisation is always ethical.

Although, totalisation may encourage the children to consider others, it also encourages 'sameness' amongst children. Homogeneity among individuals is too great a philosophical area to explore in the current writing. However, it goes without saying that individualism and freedom are at the helm of most Western political and philosophical discourse. Therefore, I would argue that a system which totalises young individuals is inherently working against the ideals which our society is based upon (Burman, 2001).

Totalisation could be regarded as a form of the more comprehensive label 'regulation'. Children tend to become regulated in a totalising fashion – the goal in the documented schools was, understandably, to bring children closer to a societal 'norm', a totality.

Totalisation, of course, has evolved over our history to reflect the need for individuals to be able to function and contribute to the same society. But this evolution has consequence for equality and valid occasions where children seek individuality, self-expression and intellectual freedom and diversity (e.g. moments involving art, music design, - feelings, thinking and doing Dockett & Perry, 2005; Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005, Davis et al 2012). Similarly, 'regulation' is double-edged sword in relation to creativity.

## 5.8 Regulation

While the previous techniques of power could be seen to have regulatory effects, this category was used specifically to look at incidents in which regulation was explicit – such as ‘...controlling by rule, subject to restrictions, invoking a rule, including a sanction, reward, punishment...’ (Gore, 1995:180).

While regulation took place within the teacher-to-pupil dynamic, it also occurred on a wider scale – the school itself was also regulated. The content of what was taught was similar across all schools – for example all children were invited to do a self-portrait (*Figure 22*) – and all the schools used the same tools for supporting learning, such as Circle (2011). The objective of what was taught was connected to assessment, the self-portrait also informing the teacher of the child’s literacy skills, as the child was asked to write his or her name on it.



Figure 22: Self-portrait by Charlie

There appeared to be very little opportunity for creativity and no opportunity to take risks in the classroom. Teachers were under pressure to fulfil the curriculum (Moriarty et al., 2001; Lyksaker & Furuness, 2011). They had very little freedom to deviate from the expected teaching schedule, as the consequences were likely to impact on the school, through test results. Erroneously, the child was viewed as the passive receiver of education, regardless of motivation. Teaching was like a force,



projected upon the child, with learning being that equal and opposite reaction (Dirk, 1998; Devine, 2002).

In the following vignette, the teacher explicitly explained the tasks she had set the children:

*Throughout the lesson Mrs McKenzie was persistent in her attempts to organise the children, who were expected to sit crossed-legged on the floor. Although many did this, others were challenged. They wriggled and Mrs McKenzie reminded them to sit still. Mrs McKenzie gave specific guidance on what was expected from them in terms of performance. 'What am I going to be looking for in our rhyme this morning?' Some children answered, all saying a similar thing, the children clearly had prior knowledge on what was expected of them. The lesson lasted almost 30 minutes, it was a controlled lesson, with individual children doing an activity while others watched and waited on their turn. Mrs McKenzie constantly gave instructions to the children, while commenting on their performance: 'You can do better than that... do it again' and 'You are Primary One children now you should be able to listen a wee while longer.' Children were regulated e.g. when to talk, when not to talk: 'We are big boys now, we don't interrupt.' Bribes and sanctions were also inculcated into the lesson: 'If we are working towards Golden Time we need to be big boys and girls' and 'Boys with their hands in their pockets look small' (Field notes, August 2012 – Westfield School).*

This observation at the school was highly illustrative. Firstly, I learned that controlling the class was of prime importance to Mrs McKenzie. Later, after having compared teachers in other schools, it became apparent that Mrs McKenzie, somewhat unreflexively, had spent a considerable amount of time and energy ensuring that the children complied with her instructions. According to Gallagher (2004), the teacher needs to have control of the class in order to teach effectively:

In a system where one teacher is required to communicate knowledge and skills to 20 to 30 pupils, those pupils must for the most part be capable of a quiet, attentive, obedient attitude if the [teacher] is to carry out her task effectively. It is easy to see that if the behaviour of each child in a class of 28 were left completely unregulated, the resulting chaos would drastically reduce the efficiency of the teaching process. (Gallagher, 2004:122)

However, James and James (2004) note:

It is apparent that control of children may sometimes be sought for reasons concerning their welfare. It is equally apparent, however, that control is also sought to prescribe some kinds of behaviour and to proscribe others, and not on the grounds of welfare but simply on the grounds of conformity... a simple and yet very clear reflection of the process by which social order is maintained across and between generations. (James and James, 2004: 3).

Clearly, a chaotic learning environment benefits no one. It can be difficult to conceive teaching and learning without any form of control, as Gallagher (2004) infers the two are closely linked together. However, in Mrs McKenzie's class, the children were not expected to be 'doers' and 'thinkers', but children who solely relied on instruction and the acceptance of an asymmetric relationship between adult and child.

In the following example, a five-year-old child explained how his behaviour was regulated. He began this interview by explaining he now knew he was 'bad', an identity he didn't associate with himself before starting school:

*'What is bad? I mean what makes someone bad?' I asked.*

*'Not sure,' replied William, 'I didn't know when I started [school].'*

*'What happens when children are "bad"?' I went on.*

*'They get punished,' he said.*

*'What does that mean?' I prompted.*

*'It means they get whacked (actions hitting his hand),' explained William, 'something like that, I can't remember.'*

*'Have you ever been there when any of the children have been punished?' I asked.*

*'They have to switch classes,' answered William, 'Cos once they have done that once, you can't change classes you have to move out.'*

*I went on, 'Can you tell me why people are punished – because they don't do their writing properly (referring to something said earlier)?'*

*'And... and... em, because, because if you don't do it neatly you don't get to go into a different class like... like... like... if you do that ten or 20 times you have to stay in class up to next year (said with emphasis) for the rest of the year,' explained William.*

*'Did the teacher say that to you?' I asked.*

*'We just knew... and once she told me... well I was quite naughty... now I am this naughty (opens his thumb and forefinger to show a little gap),' replied William.*

*'I find it hard to believe you were naughty. I don't think of you as naughty...' I said.*

*'Well that's because you don't know me now... I was littler then...' said William, 'and I never thought this is what I would grow up as.'* (Child interview, April 2013 – Northfield School).

William talked of *'being scared...being very scared...'* whispering this as if he could be heard by someone outside the room, and was visibly anxious during the 90-minute interview. His mother, seated nearby, would often give me a worried look too. This school transition had changed this child's perception of himself. When William was at *Lilybank* I cannot recall a single incident where his behaviour would have been classed as challenging. This defeatism is incredibly worrying for me as a practitioner and researcher to see. The relationship between defeatism and regulation may be another piece in the puzzle as to why our schools fail some children (Holt, 1964).

Clearly, the school system has failed to instil the love of learning, self-expression and pride in this young person – merely succeeding in making sure that he conforms and continues to conform. What is mindless conformity worth at the expense of intellect, confidence and sociability? However, objectively, the regulating mechanism had been effective. William had begun to regulate his behaviour. He alluded to instances where he resisted adult power, but now considers himself to be less 'naughty'. William also stressed that, should he not stick to the rules and regulations of the school, he would be removed from the class – and he had not ruled out corporal punishment.

As has been mentioned, some children avoided being sanctioned:

*He has seen some children in his class that need more support than others. That might be the way to put it. So I think the behaviour of them is not quite what it is supposed to be, so I think he sees a lot of it [disciplining] (Parent interview, August 2013 - Westfield).*

There were many instances of children wanting to please the teacher after they had seen another child, sometimes a friend, being sanctioned. The children learned to take, and act upon, specific instructions and guidance from the teacher. This reinforces Foucault's view that 'power is a relation between forces or rather every relation between forces is a power relation' (Deleuze, 1999:70).

Most children were keen to obey the rules. Unfortunately, this resulted in some children whom I had known to be very independent in the early years setting becoming reliant and dependent on the teacher's direction. They seemed to have found themselves unable to perform outside the structure. Children who would have previously made self-animate choices, such as putting on their coat when they went outside at break time, or deciding when to eat, no longer had a choice; children put their coats on under the direction of the teacher.

The following vignette highlighted to me how quickly the children had become regulated:

*I followed my instructions and went into a dark gym hall. I saw a long wooden bench, one of many that lined the wall. From there I had a good vantage point of the hall. I spent a few moments looking around. The hall was quite gloomy, possibly because the wall opposite was covered with curtains pulled shut. The linoleum floor was polished. There was a stage at the far end, perhaps for an assembly? A few moments later a woman entered, followed by several uniformed children all walking with a partner. The children looked my way, the study children smiled (Field notes, September 2012- Westfield School).*

In the above example, power is established through recognised forms of knowledge, scientific understandings and truth (Foucault, 1998). The teacher is known to the children as the leader – this is an accepted 'truth'. The children had recently transitioned into school, and here they were, following the teacher, with an awareness of the school boundaries – no child ran ahead of the teacher, but remained in the line with the others. The school, according to Foucault (1998), has its own regimes of truth, its general politics of truth. These are fortified and cultivated constantly throughout the institution (Hendrick, 1997; Lawrance, 2010).

This could be seen as the children walked into the hall with a partner. This directive evolved because of both the self-regulatory and regulatory behaviours we have already looked at, and has remained a constant in schooling systems for many years. It both enables action and constrains other possible actions: children were not expected to move freely but, instead, waited for instructions from the teacher.

Foucault spent much of his writings stressing the ambivalence of power, accepting that whilst it can be implemented for exploitation, it is also used as a positive force. Foucault contended:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals.’ In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth (Foucault, 1991:194).

For the transitioning children, power here produced a reality. Returning to the mind-mapping sessions prior to coming to school, the children expected to follow the teacher. For example:

*You have to listen to the teacher – my daddy says so and you have to do what she says (Rory, four years - Lilybank).*

What Rory’s sentiment shows is that power is the key factor of social discipline and conformity. Foucault (1982) identified disciplinary power that could be observed in schools. Disciplinary power, according to Foucault (1982) was not violent or destructive, but rather was intended to ‘produce docile subjects of training, correction, normalisation and surveillance’ (Gallagher, 2004:53). Disciplinary power, then, changed individuals from what they were previously. The following example illustrated how the teacher corrected and normalised to construct new forms of knowledge:

*The children were instructed to sit down in a space at the far end of the hall. Mrs McKenzie asked me what I would like to be called. I said ‘Lynn’. In an agitated way she said loudly, ‘No... what would you like the children to call you... what is your surname?’ Mrs McKenzie then introduced me as ‘Miss McNair’. ‘Some of you already know Miss McNair,’ she said, looking at the class. The*

*study children all raised their hands. I thought how quickly the children had conformed to the expected behaviours of the school, raising their hands. They did not do this in Lilybank (Field notes, August 2012 – Westfield School).*

Here, Mrs McKenzie assumed I had made a mistake. It was unthinkable to Mrs McKenzie that an adult would *choose* to be addressed by their first name in the school. Adults in this world used their title to signify to the children that they are self-nominated authorities. How adults were addressed signified the hierarchy. I complied with Mrs McKenzie's instruction and was known from thereon in as Miss McNair. Unlike the previous example, I accepted the dominance of the teacher in the classroom, thereby conforming to the very dynamics of power I was myself researching – being unable, either by defiance or compliance, to remain a neutral, objective figure in the environment.

The children, too, complied with this institutional practice by responding to the complex simultaneous processes of school life. When Mrs McKenzie asked a question, the children responded with an understanding of how they should act. They knew that raising their hands was expected as opposed to a verbal response (Ailwood, 2003). Foucault (1977) described these new mass forms of training bodies, gestures and behaviours as 'political anatomy' aimed at producing 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977:138) where social usefulness could be maximised.

Of significance, Davies (2006) argued that '...the teacher's power is invisible to her in the conduct of her teaching-as-usual practices' (Davies, 2006:431). According to Davies (2006), Mrs McKenzie carried out her traditional power-over role without any acknowledgement or question. That is, Mrs McKenzie dictated our relationship throughout. In disagreement with Foucault (1977), and others, such as MacNaughton (2003), power relations here were not fluid. In this instance I was subjugated and expected to comply.

The above example illustrates the apparent priority placed on denomination and labels within the school – at least in Scotland. It also illustrated how the children's bodies were subjugated and made to behave in certain ways. The classroom, then, became a microcosm of social control. Foucault called this 'bio-power'. Disciplinary power and bio-power create discursive practice that defines what is natural and

normal. However, Foucault argues that it is in this discursive practice that power is in constant flux and is both productive and forbidding. The following, final example illustrates how Elsa makes a transition from power-as-forbidding to power-as-productive as she questions the practices of the school:

*...it makes me feel bad that we are told how good or bad we are based on our groups. Why do they expect young kids to read and write? Is it a problem if we don't? I think children start to read and write at different ages and there are so many five-year-olds and younger in my class. A few of my friends belong to the 'circle' group and the teacher says that this is the group that tries their best but cannot read or write yet. Why did she say that and why are we grouped in the first place? I feel sad that I am in a different group and my teacher says that I can 'maybe' now move to the top group. This makes me very sad... I am scared of upsetting my teacher and don't want to constantly write. I want to move and cannot, else I will get into trouble... (Child-parent interview, February 2015 – Northfield School).*

The example above encapsulates Gore's (1990) analytics of power (surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation and regulation). Elsa 'expect[ed] to be watched' (Gore, 1995:169). She was expected to 'conform to a standard' (Gore, 1995:171), although Elsa desperately wanted to resist this normalised way of being (Tallant, 2015). Gore (2002) argues that within educational institutions '...normalisation will be a dominant technique and there is likely to be some resistance by students' (Gore, 2002:7). Marked differences were being made to all the children, excluding some and categorising them into groupings.

Of fundamental concern to Elsa was being separated from her friends. Research shows that no matter how academically capable a child is, relationships, especially friendships with peers, are key to a child's successful transition and long-term success at school (Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry et al., 2000; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Peters, 2003; 2010a; Griebel & Niesel, 2013). Being separate from her friends was likely to have negative consequences for Elsa.

Due to the mechanisms of distribution and categorisation, Elsa and her friends were placed in separate groups. Individualisation can also be seen in the groups as

children become knowledgeable about personal attributes. Totalisation was also present as the groupings happened to everyone, and *all* children were regulated, whether it was or wasn't necessary, reflecting inefficiencies in the teaching styles of all the teachers I observed.

## Conclusions of Chapter Five

The research questions addressed in this section were:

*3. How do children navigate the complexity of transition?*

*4. How fluid are the power relations in transition?*

*5. What happens when children arrive at school?*

In answer to the question, *How fluid are the power relations in transition?* the data suggests power relations could have been more flexible. Power relations include certain actions that modify behaviour. From the mechanisms illustrated above, behaviour was modified through actions, and this modification was not carried out in a reciprocal way. Power mechanisms existed in all four sites visited. Some schools used *more* of one mechanism and *less* of another. In some sites you could *feel* in your body the power mechanisms used. In other sites power mechanisms were subtler.

However, as the above examples have illustrated, a variety of power mechanisms, namely *surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation* and *regulation* (Gore, 1995), were enacted by adults. The power mechanisms were persuasive in terms of reinforcing, controlling and optimising behaviours and as strategies for producing knowledge, but the children had no say.

During this period of research and observation, it soon became apparent that, despite the majority of the 'power' definitely being in the hands of the teachers, this power was not felt by them personally. In fact, many of them often expressed that they were powerless – demonstrating a difference between 'power' and 'control'. It is unimaginable to understand how schools would teach without power mechanisms, as Gallagher (2004) stressed: '...these teachers were people who wanted above all to teach, and they found disciplinary techniques to be absolutely necessary for



achieving that purpose, given the school system within which they were working' (Gallagher, 2004: 249). Therefore, for teachers too, power relations appeared inflexible as they lived with the hierarchical demands of the institution, the expectations of parents, and navigated the temporality and diversity of being a classroom teacher.

I answered research question three, *How do children navigate the complexity of transition?* By showing how children were compliant with the institution's organisational procedures and other devices of political rationality, such as why things were done in a particular way. Very quickly, children learned the role of a school child (Rogoff, 2003), who followed the rules and learned how knowledge circulates and functions. The children did not appear to question the status of the teacher, nor why rules were being imposed. However, there were aspects that the children admittedly found challenging, such as when others were punished.

In answer to the fifth research question: *What happens when children arrive at school?* I have observed the ways in which children are tested and grouped and how targets are set for them. The individual interests of the child are often sacrificed in favour of controlling behaviours, attention span and following the programmes that teachers are set from above in the hierarchical chain. This ignores self-actualisation in favour of a conceptualised and illusory, totality. I have found that the curriculum was also misinterpreted, inasmuch as there was no room in the school testing system for adults to appreciate that children learn in different ways, or for testing that which values diversity between children (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005). When children arrive at school they are treated as neutral, fixed entities that are to be *institutionalised* in the broadest sense.

The individual capacities of children are under-explored in this industrialised system. The complex notions of school testing, grouping and target setting become transparent through exposure. The beginning of school life is therefore marked by stratagems and tactics that aim to establish and sustain a classification and ordering of children who already *fitted* into the school curriculum, with a perceived need to catalogue isolated aspects of each child, such as speed of learning, literacy, gender and communicating abilities. These attributes are treated in isolation, fostering a culture in which these very attributes are most highly prized by parents, at the

detriment of the individual child – the first in a series of illogical expectations put upon people during their lifetime – not just in school, but in wider society.

However, sometimes an individual will resist the will of the many, or a source of authority. We know that resistance can be both massively positive but also deleterious to the fabric of society. We know that political revolution, the demand for free speech and the right to live according to one's own values are all attitudes we have today following thousands of years of resistance. But we also know that civil disobedience, law-breaking and violence can be aspects of resistance too. Chapter Six will deal with the theme of resistance in a broad way, in reflection of its instances observed during my research, and what that says about the children, parents, teachers and institutions involved.

## Chapter Six: Resisting power

### Introduction

In the preceding chapter, *Totalising Power*, I presented data which illustrated that the subjugated were virtually silent and unseen (Crenshaw, 1995). I discovered that the individual interests of children were ignored and the school expected transitioning children to comply with the structures and traditions of the institution in the interests of totality.

While it appeared that teachers were the agents administering power, children, parents and teachers all gave examples of being dominated through the school's discourses and practices. In this chapter it will be shown that conflict and struggle were also present and that multiple and heterogeneous forms of power were flowing in every direction, which offered multiple points of resistance. I address the following research questions:

6. *What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition?*
7. *How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?*

I also return to the question answered in Chapter Four –

1. *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?*

From the data examples in Chapter Five, it appeared that professionals had the most power, parents had more power than children, and children had the least power (in accordance with perceived asymmetrical relationships). The structure of this chapter will look at how power is resisted by professionals, parents and children and consider what power and resistance implies for contemporary understandings of transition practices in schools.

In this chapter I will argue that the existing hierarchical structure in schools obscures deep structural conflicts which limit possibilities for a genuinely democratic society, and that certain realities are privileged over others. However, I also argue that children, parents and professionals are not passive but active agents in the power structures surrounding them. Here we can understand how *heteroglossia* upsets

monoglossia (Bakhtin, 1994). As both Foucault and Bakhtin argued, struggles are all around us; power and resistance are not a dichotomous phenomenon but operate simultaneously. Power and resistance lie on a spectrum from the Panopticon to individuals engaging at varying levels. Finally, I found that resistance was largely unseen, or ignored, by power holders.

In the paper *Bakhtin and the General Intellect*, Michael Gardiner (2016) refuses to accept the argument that individuals have gained in choice and freedom, disposable income and spaces in which they are not watched by anyone. On a related issue, specific authors argue that while power is everywhere, so is resistance. The authors agree that power and resistance are intrinsically related terms and that resistance is not exerted outside power but within it (Barbarett, 1985; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Foucault, 1990; Laclau, 1991 and others). Foucault contends:

[There is] a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence, there is no single locus of great refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case (Foucault, 1990: 95-96; [ ] my emphasis).

The above quote suggests that power and resistance are omnipresent within and between individuals all of the time (Tallant, 2015). This idea is rejected by Rorty (1991) – who presented several criticisms of Foucault’s political thought (Malecki, 2011) – and he argued that if everyone was consciously aware of power all the time in everything, there would be little opportunity for liberation. In agreement with Rorty, Taylor (1986) argues that all-encompassing power can be assumed to mean the all-pervasiveness of domination and finds this position incomprehensible (Taylor, 1986).

However, one of Foucault’s ultimate accomplishments was his critique of conventional conceptions of power as something top-down, exploitative and homogenous or monolithic. In line with this, and critical to the argument I hope to make, this writing shares the view that institutional, societal and personal power are in constant flux.

## 6.1 Professional resisters

Before embarking on this chapter it may be helpful to outline what resistance may or may not be. Resistance implies ‘power against which one is resisting’. Resistance is not about ‘establishing an alternative which is doomed to failure but about recognising ambiguity at a local and localised level...’ (Usher and Edwards (1994: 183-185). This ambiguity of resistance is one I would endorse and this explanation is the antithesis to a totalising system discussed in Chapter Five (Butin, 2016).

It has been suggested (Fraser, 1981; Taylor, 1986; Habermas, 1987; Shrag, 1999) that while Foucault (1990) advanced thinking in connecting power to resistance, his ideas cannot be meaningfully applied to the definitions of resistance. Indeed, this lack of definition has been highly criticised. Drawing on the work of Fraser (1981) and Habermas (1987), Pickett (1996) said ‘...critics charge that without introducing some normative reasons why resistance is preferable to submission, Foucault cannot explain why anyone should resist’ (Pickett, 1996:445). Shrag (1999) adds that Foucault treated resistance as ‘beside the point’, apportioning less significance to it (Shrag, 1999: 378).

Taking the various arguments into consideration, I have considered that Foucault (1977) did unmask hidden mechanisms of domination in other ways that were too compelling to ignore. It was difficult, therefore, to see how a chapter on power and resistance could not include Foucault. However, I have also sought out others who define resistance, and who advance and illustrate the argument. These theorists are inserted at the relevant points. I have begun analysing the data with Scott’s (1987) definition of resistance.

Scott (1987) explained the concept of resistance as something that is disguised, as non-confrontational, informal and concealed. The data revealed that, through the constant interplay of social forces in and out of the classroom, there were many examples of non-confrontations, informal and concealed resistance (also White 2016). While I am not claiming that the relationship between power and resistance can be reduced entirely to this pattern, I would like to present in this chapter some examples of resistance under those headings. One example of non-confrontational and informal resistance can be found here:

*...teachers are stressed mainly due to an increase in workload brought about by the introduction of the CfE and the adoption of new schemes of work [SEAL, Heinemann Active Maths and Literacy Rich]. These all take time to get used to. Also many old resources were taken away as they were in not in line, but teachers are expected to source their own, often using the internet... this is, of course, my personal opinion and in no way is meant as a criticism of my colleagues who I find to be as dedicated and hard-working as ever as they try to manage with constantly shifting goal posts (Teacher interview, May 2015 – Southfield School).*

The criticisms expressed by the teacher concerned the implementation of the *Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)* (2004). According to him, additional resources were put in place that added complexity to the teaching process. Colleagues had very little time to adjust and implement these into everyday pedagogical practice and the fast pace of change risked derailing some teachers (Lawler and Bilson, 2010).

White (2016) argues that if we lived in a monologic world ‘of obedience and allegiance to one discourse. There is no interplay of voice. For Bakhtin this is problematic because there is no interplay of voice and by association, no room for creativity’ (White, 2016: 342-343). Moss (2014) argues that transformation is ongoing and constantly changing – in order to transform, the process must be open-ended and constantly becoming.

In the example above, the teacher gave the impression that there was little opportunity for dialogue. According to White (2016), not all teachers align themselves with the curriculum. However, if the local authority had listened to the teachers, they would have heard that it was not the curriculum that he and other teachers had difficulty with, but the processing of it. This may suggest that the (many) new schemes are not only ineffectual, but detrimental to teaching practices because of a lack of time and the relationship between time pressure and resistance. This concern is echoed by White (2016), who contends:

*In situations where...authorities don't operate on a principle of trust or exert a great deal of pressure on teachers based on external accountabilities, teachers can be discursively obedient. They are seen to fulfil requirements publicly but underneath there are murmurings, secrets and practices that betray their real point. I have*

witnessed these secret dialogues in staffrooms when those who represent authority leave the building (White, 2016: 154).

The sharing of this information was an example of undermining power relations. It was not intended to affect the power of the local authority as it was unlikely that the teachers' criticisms would be shared directly with them. Local authorities are creatures of statute and will only follow that statute. As Bakhtin (1981) attests 'authoritative discourses are constantly present in organisations of social and government life' (Bakhtin, 1981:99).

For this reason, it may be perceived as difficult to challenge dominant powers, such as the local authority. Scott (1987) claims the type of outpouring above is a form of disguised resistance. However, White (2016) writes of the 'metaphorical dust' that gets swept under the carpet – concerns and issues that are discussed between teachers may not reach the people who need to listen. For example, the teacher, who appeared placid on the surface, dared not criticise his superiors openly. However, behind the scenes, he created a social space where he considered his concerns in an unceremonious way. I could detect his frustration as he shared his dissatisfaction with me.

Whilst it may develop individual and collective political conscientiousness, the irony of this form of resistance was that it was likely to add to personal stress as issues raised in non-confrontational ways may never be resolved, leading to increased repression. Davis (2012) encourages professionals to confront the dominant powers, arguing that professionals should work out strategies to overcome barriers and develop capacities to promote change. Bakhtin (1994) would argue this type of monoglossia is inevitably disrupted by *heteroglossia*.

Importantly, considering the excerpt above, I certainly do not want to claim that teachers are passive acceptors of top-down directives. However, as White (2016) reminds us, 'teachers are highly accountable to authorities. They must also bear allegiance to the profession itself – [which is] characterised by codes of practice, curriculum and regulation' (White, 2016:154) [my emphasis].

What I do want to assert is that, whilst teachers found themselves enveloped within impersonal fields and forces, they found their own way to resist by coming up

with more personal, creative ways to deliver the curriculum. I was continually impressed by their methods. Interestingly, in all four schools, no teacher delivered it in the same way (Gardiner, 2016). Lacan (1979), like Derrida (1982), Foucault, (1990), Lyotard (1992) and White (2016) challenges us to rethink the nature of knowledge and the function of education. White (2016) adds that, as a starting point, we should look at the school through a new lens.

From my observations and dialogue with them, I would agree with the teacher above – all the teachers in this study were ‘dedicated and hard-working’. This is in line with the findings of Gallagher (2004). According to White (2016), ‘it can be difficult for teachers to act in ways that might be less obedient to the privileged pedagogies that are held sacrosanct’ (White, 2016:158). Dedication to their chosen profession meant that, whilst teachers complied with and consented to pedagogical practices which benefited the children, they also, at times, resisted practices that went against their values and ideologies:

*‘Young teachers complete the paperwork as a priority, planning predetermined outcomes for children, it is part of their culture, whereas I [the head teacher] do not value the paperwork above teaching, so they [the Council] have to wait’ (Field notes, September 2012 – Westfield School).*

According to Vinthagen and Lilja (2007), resistance is, at all times, about denying, challenging or undermining power (also Usher & Edwards, 1994). The authors write that resistance comes with an intent or consciousness of the resister (also Fine, 1991). In the above example the head teacher expressed his intent that the dominant powers would have to ‘wait’. He made reference to the ‘young’ teachers optimising their contribution to the social system and to the changing cultures and practices, by ranking paperwork as something important.

However, for him, teaching children took precedence. The staff at *Lilybank* disagreed that planning should take precedence over direct work with children. Instead, they believed that learning environments should be multi-voiced spaces, where children and teachers were involved in the planning of an open-ended curriculum. The practitioners believed that ambiguity and uncertainty were an



essential feature of teaching and learning. Apple (2006, 2011) argues that when children are not involved in planning the curriculum they are denied the opportunity to transform the world.

When the teacher plans, without children, towards curricular endpoints, education becomes a ‘vast supermarket’ and the children become human capital in a global and competitive economy (also Davies, 2009). Gardiner (2016) argues that the idea of capitalism is in deeper crisis today than it was between the wars. This idea links to Nuthall (2007), who suggests that predetermined outcomes are generally economically defined. In this way the school is reconstructing itself as an enterprise to compete in the knowledge business, where the classroom is like a marketplace producing children with certain knowledge.

This head teacher appeared to want something different in his school. I further speculated, as I observed him in the school, that teaching was something done *with* children. His non-confrontational type of resistance – by expressing his intent to make the local authority ‘wait’ – is an example of what Butin (2016) claims, by being able to resist, we create ourselves. Here the head teacher expressed his ability to resist. Although it may only be known by him, it mattered.

Foucault (1977) argued that this type of resistance in the workplace was not unusual and a range of conflicts and struggles could be easily found in the school institution, such as passive and active acts, and subtle and covert resistance (also White, 2016). Chiming with this idea, Aronowitz and Giroux (1993), further add that power is at the root of all forms of behaviour in which people say no, struggle, resist, use oppositional modes of discourse, and fight for a different vision of the future.

Foucault (1977) noted that the social space where resistance took place was of importance. It may not have been as easy for the head teacher to implement his temporal resistance if he shared an environment with the political forces who expected the paperwork to be done. In the private/apolitical space of the school, it may have been easier to resist the expectations of structural domination and oppression.

Whilst Foucault did not define resistance, he did discuss genealogy, and the genealogy of resistance. I found this helpful in analysing some of my data, as I

discovered that for some participants, current constructions of power and resistance were historically dependent.

A simple definition of Foucauldian genealogy is that it is a type of history (Durkheim, 1970). Foucault explains this further: ‘And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental to the field of events or run in its empty sameness throughout the course of history’ (Gordon, 1980:117). Through Foucault’s genealogy of power and resistance, it is possible to understand how the historical dominant discourse impacts on everyday practice and how a genealogy of resistance exists:

*I was excited about the arrival of the new curriculum as it seemed to me, and many of my infant colleagues, to fit perfectly into our idea of the whole child. It also promised to widen the narrow confines of 5-14<sup>4</sup> which we felt too narrow and prescriptive. The CfE is indeed wide and perhaps this has led to it being redesigned into a format that is more akin to 5-14. It is my personal opinion that this 5-14isation of the CfE makes it easier for teachers to firstly understand and teach it and secondly, makes it easier to report to parents. I feel that many of the heads and deputes found it too cumbersome and complicated and wanted to make it more slimline, as this was the kind of curriculum they were raised on. They do not feel at ease with a curriculum as far reaching as CfE. I think the teachers have the skills to deliver but many of the schemes such as SEAL, Heinemann Active Maths and Literacy Rich are more suited to 5-14 as they are narrow, rely often on whole class lessons and play lip service to active involvement. I feel that huge bits of the curriculum are being missed out at the expense of maths and language (Teacher interview, May 2015 – Eastfield School).*

The teacher in the above example spoke of the somewhat melancholy experiences of past curriculums. Historical conjectures were an essential analytical underpinning to his argument. He claimed that others, such as teachers, deputes and heads, were stuck in the past. I believe that this is consistent with Foucault’s genealogy of

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<sup>4</sup> The 5-14 curriculum was the curriculum in place prior to the Curriculum for Excellence (2004). The 5-14 curriculum took children through primary school and the first two years of secondary school. For further guidelines please refer to: <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/5to14/guidelines/>.

resistance. Shrag (1999) warns educationalists intent on employing a Foucauldian perspective that Foucault has little or nothing to offer educationalists. However, I did find the genealogy of resistance helpful in analysing this data.

In Foucault's genealogy, the genealogist was an interpreter, not a hermeneutician (Durkheim, 1970), uncovering 'grey' material – in Foucault's view the past is neither black or white, but 'grey' (a metaphor borrowed from Nietzsche). This 'greyness' I have interpreted as the inseparability and intersection of time and space – as complex human beings we cannot understand the present or future without knowing the past. The genealogist-interpreters are able to position themselves in the historical context whilst simultaneously examining it from afar with detachment.

In contrast, the hermeneutician, like our teacher above, engages with the process, examining his findings from within. Both the interpreter-genealogist and the interpreter-hermeneutician are caught up in the networks of power. Both are encouraged by Foucault to question truths and certainties (such as, in the example given, the causality of the two curriculums) and identify opportunities for progressive change.

In this way genealogy is a perspectival endeavour that allows for possibilities. The teacher above said '*I feel*' – from this it could be interpreted that there was some doubt in his response, that there were no truths or certainties. He reflexively came up with an analysis based on his perspective, that the system was unjust. Through both engendered and intensified contradictions, he concluded that the result of a 'narrow prescriptive' view of the new curriculum by the 'heads and deputes' would have negative implications for the children.

Foucault would argue that the interpretation made by the teacher was neither true nor false, but his impression. Indeed, the 'heads and deputes' may argue that the teacher's view was a mere fabrication. This is what Foucault claimed was insightful about genealogy, that there was nothing fixed, which casts doubt on any truth. The teacher had his perspective of events, and it is likely that, if consulted, the heads and deputes would have their own perspective – everything in genealogy is open to interpretation.

As Bakhtin (1991) argues, no party should ever be forced into consensus. Genealogy shows, therefore, that interpretations are reliant on specific configurations

of power. According to Sembou (2011): ‘The task of Foucault’s genealogy is to offer us a different interpretation, to make a different perspective known, in order to allow for the possibility of us becoming otherwise than we are’ (Sembou, 2011: 20). Genealogy of resistance helps us understand and challenge historical assumptions about current practices. Many diverse perspectives emerge with all involved having partial contributions to make, with contradictions, tensions and immanent possibilities uncovered. However, this may be the greatest weakness of Foucault’s genealogy of resistance, as tensions continue to exist.

Some teachers expressed concern about the testing of young children:

*I know that a lot of teachers finding the testing on PIs to be premature while some argue that it gives a standard that they can measure progress with. I fundamentally disagree with testing children so young... I feel that it is far too early to start making decisions and judgments on a child’s ability (Teacher, May 2015 – Westfield School).*

This type of resistance I found to be a common feature of school life, where teachers would seek me out to express their concerns. It was as if by expressing their concerns to me it absolved them of being connected to pedagogical practice which they did not agree with, a confession of sorts. White (2016) discovered something similar: ‘In my data I noticed that teachers often drop their voices to a whisper. Speak from behind their hand as an aside or giggle nervously when they say something that is not consistent with the authoritative discourse’ (White, 2016: 158). In my research, teachers would often look over their shoulder to see who was around – sometimes before speaking, but most of the time when they were telling me something that they were not sure they should be.

Ryan (2016) makes the point that we should keep an open mind about what counts as resistance. Drawing from the work of Foucault (1978), Ryan (2016) argues that there are multiple possibilities of resistance. Some models of resistance are ‘solitary’, some are ‘spontaneous’, and others are ‘concerted’ (Ryan, 2016:39). The main point for Ryan is that they cannot be absolutely defined due to ‘their transitory and changing nature, but the enduring characteristics of resistances is that they are intricately connected to exercises of power’ (Ryan, 2016:39).

The following example of resistance is complex. It is an example of constitutive antagonism, which according to Karatzogianni and Robinson (2010), can often be found in the school and is intricately connected to exercises of power.

*The head teacher spoke to me today, wanting to know how everything was going. I asked if all schools were expected to follow the same activities, the head teacher answered 'Yes... the Curriculum for Excellence is an excellent curriculum but we are not allowed to implement it because of pressures that come from above in the form of Quality Improvement Officer expectations'. The head teacher showed me a document that he had been working on the preceding weekend explaining that children in P4 and P7 had been tested. He explained that schools did not get to know what particular children were tested, nor do schools get to know what aspects of work were assessed. This, '...amounts to statistics... the children are statistics'. From the results it did not look like the school was performing well. The head teacher explained he would be raising this as an issue at the primary heads meeting (Field notes, September 2012 – Westfield School).*

Here the conflicting interests of the head teacher and the local authority were the basis of this resistance. Gardiner (2016) writes of the soft control and surveillance which are symptomatic of a loss of control that results in a totalising grasp over everyone, everywhere. The head teacher experienced a loss of control, until he considered how to take some control back. It is argued that resistance can make the situation worse, but not to have the opportunity to transform something is the most dangerous position (Butin, 2016).

This form of resistance is what Scott (1990) would describe as an 'everyday' form of resistance, where the subjugated resist those who have power over them in some significant way. Apple puts forward that '...we should not assume that teachers or [children] are totally unaware of what is happening. How do they understand these things? How do they possibly find the holes in these discourses and mechanisms in creative ways so as to allow for spaces of resistance?' (Apple, 1998:424). What I discovered was that the teachers and the children did find creative ways to resist. However, often this resistance was not overt or noticed by another.

The institutional arrangements in the school were organised so that the head teacher answered to senior personnel at the local authority. Thus social mobility was

an accepted part of the school institution. The ideologies justifying this kind of domination include formal assumptions about inferiority and superiority. In turn, there are rituals which regulate professional contact among strata and subsequent power-laden actions, such as the removal of children's work without any discussion about what work was being assessed and why. The dominant powers defined and constituted what was important. Scott (1990) argued: 'Dominant groups often have much to conceal, and typically they also have the wherewithal to conceal what they wish' (Scott, 1990:12). The head teacher found this concealment by his superiors both arbitrary and capricious. However, while he did not raise his concerns with his superiors, there was an element of reluctance.

In me, the head teacher found someone who he could *voice* his unspoken thoughts to. His anger and indignation overtook his discretion. However, the head teacher did not breach the etiquette of power relations by addressing his concerns to the local authority. Instead he planned to raise his concerns with primary head teachers. This may have elicited reactions that were broadly comparable if it emerged that others shared a similar experience, and this was very likely. Here a shared critique of domination may be heard. Scott (1990) describes this as a 'hidden transcript' where issues and concerns are spoken about behind the back of the dominant powers and outside the intimidating gaze of power.

I further speculated that the head teacher may not be in a position to share his concerns within the social site of the school, with social actors considered his subordinates. Public performances of deference and loyalty to the institution were important and political sensitivity was symbolically displayed.

Instead, the head teacher put on a brave face, a mask if you like, to his team as he acted deferentially and in agreement with local authority directives and actions. However, in the almost clandestine arena of the primary heads meetings he would find safety and an opportunity to express his concerns. The head teacher's 'hidden transcript' would be elaborated within a restricted 'public' that would be hidden from others, such as the team at the school. The primary head teachers' meetings were a zone where struggle between the dominant and the subordinate existed.

In answer to question seven - '*How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?*' - the data suggests that the teachers in this study were

reflexive and willing to change. The teachers' positions in school were that of resistance, opposition and inventiveness. Callaway (1992) provides a clear definition of reflexivity, in sum, radical consciousness. This radical consciousness was expressed in tactically prudent ways as teachers expressed their concerns about current practices.

In the examples given above, all the teachers or head teachers provided different experiences of how power was exercised, and all illustrated resistance to dominant powers. And I corroborate with Barbaret, 1985; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Foucault, 1990; Laclau, 1991 and others that power and resistance are irrevocably intertwined and one cannot investigate power without examining resistance. More importantly, one cannot investigate power without expecting that resistance will follow in some form. I can claim no originality for my observations about power and resistance being irrevocably intertwined, but what I have shown in this section is how teachers resist power in diverse ways and at frequent intervals.

I did find, however, that many examples of resistance are hidden from more dominant powers, such as senior managers from the local authority. They tended to be more clandestine in the school institution, where teachers were happy to pour out their concerns, but rarely were their concerns openly expressed with the dominant powers (Davis & Smith, 2012). The face that teachers and head teachers presented to the 'public' – children, parents and other professionals – was not always their true one. The outward impression given to the 'public' was that the school was a calm place. But I discovered that bubbling under the surface was much political conflict, or as White (2016) puts it, 'metaphorical dust'.

It was unlikely that reflection and reflexivity by teachers would enable much change, as their ideas were often expressed in covert ways. Rather than openly rebel or publicly protest, they adopted a more prudent course of anonymous action, avoiding any irrevocable acts of defiance. Whilst teachers are reflective and reflexive about their practices, they may not have the opportunity to make changes to the distinctive needs of particular children due to not having their voices heard. They would subsequently have to live with 'commercialised package programmes and prescriptive responses' (White, 2016: 158).

The lack of policies and processes of transition based on children and teachers voices was of concern to this thesis, as teachers were likely to, unintentionally, make subjective judgments about children based on limited knowledge, as developmental milestones continue to hold a privileged status in education. This may mean that in transition, there is no room for dialogic processes concerned with listening to the unique nature of this period of children's lived lives.

## 6.2 Parents as resisters

At the outset, through priming events such as visits to the school, and school literature, the hegemony of the school's values was shared with a sprawling range of new and enthusiastic parents. Head teachers and teachers took great pains to foster a positive public image. At this early point in the transition, parents learned about the stratification of the school, who gives orders and who takes orders. Parents were expected to endorse the school's values and be willing, enthusiastic partners. Parents were encouraged to see themselves as '...consumers, expecting schools to deliver educational outcomes' (Alcock, 2013: 29). Most parents were deferential and agreeable – accepting the school discourse and willing to train their children in the routines of conformity. However, other parents were frustrated by incomplete communications:

*When William first started at the parents' greeting thing, we also asked about the rules and what they meant, because they told you what you should do, and then left us to infer what you are not meant to do. We felt like as adults we didn't understand what the rules were. And you know...it is not fair to children, who are brand new to that environment, to not give them really clear guidelines when there is also a punishment system and if they break the rules they get punished. But they don't really get given boundaries and then we really wanted to know when William was at nursery and play fighting, was that allowed. And they couldn't even give us an answer about that. And you know what, we raised that. You know the 'golden rules' don't actually give you that guidance so how could we actually support our child (Parent interview, April 2013 – Northfield School).*



This parent did not object to instilling habits of obedience and hierarchy into her child. Her main anxiety was to understand how the discipline mechanisms functioned within the school. The parent's particular concern was that her child may make indiscretions that would result in him, unwittingly, contravening the rules. Resistance here is what Scott (1990) describes as a 'public transcript', where the resister lets the dominant powers know about her dissatisfaction.

Other parents commented on the lack of clarity:

*He has struggled with the brutality of the school playground and the lack of skilled leadership from adults responsible at these times... considering the amount of social learning that is going on as he develops relationships, and that playtime is the one time they are free to test and develop these, you'd think there might be more support and guidance in how to develop understanding, compassion, assertiveness, empathy, etc., for each other (Parent interview, July 2013 – Westfield School).*

The children, then, were expected not to just know the rules, but anticipate how they should interpret them and apply them to personal circumstances (Margetts, 2002; Dunlop, 2003; Thornberg, 2008). I discovered, as in the example above, parents' disagreements with the school were sequestered wherever possible, out of sight and not raised directly. While some parents may have developed a personal fantasy of confrontation, expressions of resistance were what Scott (1990) described as 'disguised' (also Gardiner, 2016).

In a similar way to the teachers' examples shared elsewhere, most of the parents in dispute with the school expressed dissatisfaction. However, they were unlikely to partake in any dramatic forms of rebellion. In the following example, 'the rules' emerged again in this instance; the parent conveyed an outward sense of conformity towards the holder of a particular status. However, out of earshot, the parent held the teacher in private contempt:

*It is the tightrope, very strict, this is the way it is and then the pressure that surrounds that as well because they make a huge [parent hesitates]; they were to remember to bring their book bags every day... the teacher was clearly getting frustrated about it, so she took to shouting over the heads of the pupils in the morning:*

*'Everybody has to remember their book bag'... and Alba keeps telling me if someone forgets their book bag... and obviously it worries her that people forget their book bag sometimes because you know there is a big pressure on the book bag thing and it being important. And that there is that careful balance between learning the rules, and liking the rules, and knowing where you stand and how to behave in the right way and everything to be happy in the world as a result. You know this pressure, I thought within the first week to be shouting to all the parents on a daily basis on how important this was, and you know Alba, she had told the teacher one day that someone had forgotten their book bag. I know Alba would not have done this in a kind of tell-tale way, she'll have been concerned, thinking, 'Oh no this has happened what will we do'. She had never told me this before, so it really made an impact. The teacher snapped at her you know, and said Alba didn't need to interfere, it made quite an impression (Parent interview, November 2012 – Eastfield School).*

In the above example, from the privileged site of her home, the parent referred to the 'tightrope' and the 'strict[ness]' of the school, especially to the daily command shouted out to the children and parents and the imposed indignity of this action. Vick and Martinez (2011) argue that the way the teacher uses their voice reflects their teaching style. In the above example, the teacher's tone is challenged by the parent (Vinthagen & Lilja, 2007) and sowed the seeds of anger, frustration and indignation. As Scott (1990) points out, 'Relations of domination, are at the same time, relations of resistance' (Scott, 1990:45).

Significantly connected to this experience was that Alba had been scolded for doing what she thought was the right thing to do. The parent was most concerned about the (perceived) abuse of her child. The inability to protect her child against the abuses of power was simultaneously a slight to her motherhood. Her child was, in her opinion, wrongly accused and both child and mother suffered for it.

When I conducted this parent interview, the anger expressed by Alba's mother had already found an outlet – she had joined the school parent council.<sup>5</sup> At the interview she informed me, *'I am working on things'* (Field notes, November 2012). Her husband agreed, and said *'Yes, she will find a way'* (Field notes, November 2012). Subordinates often collude (Scott, 1990) and create a subculture where

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<sup>5</sup> The parent council is a group of parents selected by members of the parent forum (the collective name for every parent, carer or guardian at a school) to represent all the parents of children at the school.

concerns are shared. This parent was taking on the school on her own terms, fighting it in her own way. Judging by her husband's comment, she had used a similar strategy before.

Some parents are quite capable of tactically manipulating school systems and policies for their own ends. This parent admitted that she intended to put on a benign face and comport herself in ways that would not breach the etiquette of the power relations in the school, but adopt a position that would enable her to become part of the institution.

The parent said: '*The way I see it I have seven years to make a difference*', (Field notes, November 2012). This suggests that parent councils are infused with power, as the parent intended to politely adhere to the etiquette expected of a parent council member, while challenging and reducing the hierarchical order of the school. Opportunities for resistance can exist where a small number of parents have the opportunity to influence power. However, it is worth noting that it is the voice of the few, not the voice of the many that is heard in such an arena.

In the next example, a parent discovered that other parents had been persuaded and consequently convinced that homework was natural and inevitable. This was contested:

*I mentioned to several other parents that I thought homework should be optional. This was met with shock, that we would actually not do the homework and that we might actually prefer it (laughs). And we were surprised that even the parents were expressing to me they were struggling to get their child to do the homework... and my response was, 'Don't do it' (Parent interview, April 2013 – Northfield School).*

This parent found that many parents shared her dislike of the tyrannical homework tasks, thinking it was too much for their child after a long day at school (this included many children attending after school club for up to 2.5 hours) (Cartmel, 2007). The parents conveyed her disdain for homework in the playground, out of the earshot of power holders. This is what Scott (1990) named the 'hidden transcript', where people rallied together and spoke behind closed doors (or in open playgrounds).

The balance of power in the school was significantly skewed against the parents who, against their wishes, carried on doing homework with their child. The parents admitted that they would not contest homework policy, which could give the appearance of consent to it. The parents then, unwittingly, contributed to the dominant school discourse. Foucault (1997) has shown with much force how people govern and manage their own behaviour according to the expectation of others. As Gardiner (2016) argues, social dialogue does not take place without buffers, hierarchies, and looping cliques, and through this process ideas are altered.

Foucault's notion of governmentality is helpful here. Foucault defined governmentality as being 'understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state or of oneself' (Foucault, 1997:82). The reality for some parents was that the school implemented a homework programme and they had no choice but to act upon it.

However, the parent from *Lilybank* who challenged the others not to do homework questioned this. What was not clear from this example though, was how far the resistance reached. It was hard to determine whether this parent would have influenced other parents. According to another parent: '*some parents place a lot of emphasis on school work, homework...*' (Parent interview, January, 2015 – *Westfield School*). Here we have two extremes of resistance to the homework policy – an example of the 'hidden transcript' (Scott, 1987), where parents chat out of the earshot of dominant powers, and one 'public transcript' (Scott, 1987), where another parent outwardly contests the homework policy. I found it reasonable to assume that this parent would have stimulated debate but it was harder to determine whether anyone did as the parent suggested – '*Just don't do it*' (Parent interview, April, 2013).

The following examples relate to parents' concerns about the hegemonic curriculum:

*Surely school should be somewhere where children are encouraged to learn new ways of doing things, helped to question and challenge in a positive way, as the future generation. Surely they should be helped not to fit into how we have always done things but given the*

*space and encouragement to explore how we can improve things – we as parents were challenged and as a result learnt so much through him and what he learnt at Lilybank – this is missing at school (Parent interview, July 2013 – Westfield School).*

*To do well in school, one must learn all the theories and facts postulated within a specific framework in allocated time. This is very stressful for educators as they have to take into account the abilities, aptitudes and behaviours of 30-odd children from different backgrounds (Parent interview, January 2015 – Northfield School).*

*Now why does a five-year-old or six-year-old **have** to be able to read and write by a certain age? Do we all learn music, dance, math, science, read books the same way, at the same speed and within the exact stipulated time? Do we all not have different ways of processing information and different interests? Then why are children any different? What good is it to tell a child you need to cross your arms, sit still and control your bladder as if you are all basically pack rats and must use the bathroom at the same time – not only that but you must go home and continue to ‘learn’ math by doing your math ‘homework’? Surely, this is the fastest way to kill a child’s penchant for learning! Education, in my opinion, is about exploration and not control. Sadly, in my limited experience with the school system so far, this is what they seem to focus on (Parent interview, January 2015 – Northfield School).*

*The system is looking at churning out robots and not thinkers, creators, artists and philosophers (Parent interview, February 2015 – Southfield School).*

In the above examples, the parents challenged the hegemonic curriculum, arguing for it to be more creative (Davis et al., 2012). This resistance illustrated some of the complexities of education – and explained how it is always political and interrelated with dominant societal discourses, as the parents challenged the reproduction and transmission of knowledge. This challenge can be connected to Routledge (1997), who argues that resistance is ‘any action imbued with intent that attempts to challenge, change or retain particular circumstances relating to societal relations, processes and / or institutions...’ (Routledge, 1997:361).

Davis et al. (2012) contend that hierarchical control kills off creativity and innovation. The parents above showed very deep understanding of the primary effects of inflexible approaches to teaching and learning – that they do not consider the differences in how children learn and would be detrimental to valuable learning.

This also applied to the pervasive and powerful methods of social control and containment used in the classroom, which restricted the child and impacted on learning. While the data may suggest that the parents had no realistic choice other than compliance, their expressed disapproval shows resistance exists (Vinthagen & Lilja, 2007). There is every reason to expect that some will raise their concerns at parent evenings and when possible with other parents. The examples showed that some parents are neither persuaded or indoctrinated by school systems.

Ritualistic assessments permeated all aspects of school life, such as those which contributed to the groups children were put into. Assessment activities were *prima facie*, not totally objected to by parents. Ideologically, assessments were considered valuable, insofar as a method of assessing children contained, among other things, a vision of how things should be. What parents openly deplored was being treated as outsiders in the process (Shields, 2009):

*I am unhappy the results are not shared with Ninja Rock and us. We have had very little information about it... the objection comes from a lack of information and non-sharing. We would probably be okay with it all if we were more involved. Who's it for and why? And why cannot it be shared? (Parent interview, November 2012 – Westfield School).*

*The school did not share any of the baseline details... her teacher did seem aware of her love of patterns... they would not divulge anything about the testing nor what the level of work groups in class meant. It all seemed a bit silly to me and a bit insulting that they assumed parents would use the information in a negative fashion (Parent interview, July 2013 – Eastfield School).*

Parents objected to the fact that the results were virtually unknown to them, although some admitted that they could work out their child's success (or not) by their groupings. They also objected to being excluded from the academic process and treated as unengaged spectators (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000). This very concern was shared by a head teacher elsewhere and yet here the parents were having a similar experience, not knowing what was being assessed and why.

*I was just told everything was fine...For me the most important aspect of these few years at school is the social aspect rather than the literacy, maths or reading. I don't think those tests cover all the children's experiences, such as more personal experiences (Parent interview, July 2013 – Eastfield School).*

And while some parents on the face of it accepted that their child was being assessed, others expressed confusion:

*...they [the teacher / head teacher] were saying we are not, we don't want to pressure the kids... that is the objective of the first year... smooth transition... and then the week after we had the meeting with the teacher we were discussing targets... the contract we need to set up is for literacy, maths and health and well-being... we had no idea it was going to be this target setting thing... one of the parents was laughing in the playground saying 'This target setting thing is all good and well', but her daughter had come home saying 'I've made two new friends so that's it, I am not going to make any more' [laughs] so if you want a nation of box tickers then that is the way to do it (Parent interview, November 2012 – Eastfield School).*

I asked the question, number one - *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?* - From the outset, parents were aware of what the thinking behind the curriculum was and that the children would be assessed according to developmental expectations. Parents could resist this thinking but the school continued to have power over parents by, for example, regulating when they were allowed to congregate together in the school playground. In the parent council they did have the opportunity to share knowledge, compare injustices, conspire and foment activist intrigues. However, a fair degree of etiquette regulated public conduct within the parent councils. Parents expressed resistance amongst themselves, but, overall most did not raise seek radical change. Rorty might have argued that this made many parent's resistance nihilistic (somewhat like Foucault).

### **6.3 Children as resisters**

We can only begin to measure the influence of a teacher's presence on a classroom of students once he or she leaves the room – or when they leave the room at the end of recess. Aside from what they say,

the typical explosion of chatter and physical exuberance released when school is out, compared with their previous behaviour in the classroom, does tell us something retrospectively about the effect of the school teacher on behaviour (Scott, 1990: 25)

I have argued elsewhere (Chapter 5.1) that part of the teachers' role was to implement mechanisms of control through awe, wonder and intimidation. The end goal would be that children would turn into durable and expedient compliant beings (the reader will remember five-year-old William). However, as Foucault (1977) has persuasively argued, power and resistance exist together. In the following example I was taken on a tour on the school. The teachers put on a credible performance of authority and the children put on a credible performance of subservience. However, this is simplifying things greatly – what lay underneath the surface was something quite different:

*'We are not allowed in there...just [name of teacher] and other [teachers] of the school,' explains Ninja Rock.*

*The boys boldly ran upstairs to Primary 7, the boys make lots of noise... they seem to really enjoy making as much noise as they can, stamping their feet and laughing loudly. I could only imagine, by the way the boys were behaving, that they had wanted to stamp loudly up these stairs for some time. We stop outside a classroom.*

*'Is that a space you would like to show me?' I ask.*

*The boys nod. (This was to be their room in P2, the age-graded system appeared to have much appeal to the boys).*

*'We can knock,' suggests Ninja Rock, framing it as a question, but meaning it as a statement.*

*'That's a good idea Ninja Rock...we can introduce ourselves,' I reply.*

*'Ninja Rock you knock,' says Philip.*

*Ninja Rock knocks (the boys all laugh – but demonstrate they are reluctant to enter). The boys wait, there is no answer. Ninja Rock turns the handle and pushes the door. The boys pop their head round the door.*

*'What do you want?' shouts the occupant. Ninja Rock stood silent, but defiant. He was not ready to leave the space.*

*'Good morning, we wondered if we could have a look at your classroom,' I enquire.*

*Failing to banish us the teacher responded by saying, 'Oh right', her voice came across as being slightly clipped and impatient.*



*'The boys have been giving me a tour of the school and this is where they will come next apparently,' I explain the strong incentive for the boys wanting to explore this room in particular. 'Oh right', said the teacher again, smiling at me without mirth. 'I'll go to the staff room.'* (Field notes, March 2013- Westfield School).

What was beyond doubt was that the teacher was upset at being interrupted. There was no attempt to conceal her annoyance – she immediately adopted an authoritarian approach and raised her voice (Meighan & Harber, 2007). However, whilst my counteracting influence and intrusion may have thrown the teacher off guard, at no time did the children back away. They did not venture onto the path of open, collective defiance by walking into the classroom – instead they waited patiently, fostering the impression of compliance, agreement and deference.

Interestingly, the teacher's shouting was uncontested by the children and did not seem to upset them, nor (overtly) the teacher (Buzzelli, 1996). Neither did it appear to affect their enthusiasm for further investigation. On the contrary, after the teacher had left the children explored the classroom with vigour and interest (perhaps because it would be their next classroom).

The tour lasted 90 minutes and the children took me inside and outside; taking photographs of things that interested them, mainly of each other. It was obvious that they relished a newfound freedom of movement, with endless possibilities for emancipation (Scott, 1990). The children thrived in areas where there was no surveillance and an entirely different atmosphere existed as they relaxed into the children I knew from *Lilybank*. They demonstrated a good knowledge of where everything was and could explain the weekly routines of when they went to the library, the computer suite and so on.

However, notably, and by some unspoken agreement, their behaviour changed when they came into contact with an adult. They immediately stopped their chatter, shifting their posture from loose and relaxed to rigid and silent, to what Corrigan (1991) termed the 'tightening of the bodies'. This, too, was analogous with what Foucault (1980) named 'controlling bodies'. Foucault (1977) explained how power impacted on the body, making it possible to 'invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs' (Foucault, 1977:13).

However, while the children's bodies reacted to seeing teachers, they quickly started chatting and moving freely when they were no longer under surveillance.

Another example of Foucault's (1977) 'controlling body' was found when the children had been running around the assembly hall. It was clear that this was not allowed, as evidenced by their behaviour on sighting an adult (Tallant, 2015). Without uttering a greeting, the adult looked at the children. Within a second they had ceased moving, warning each other of impending punishment and whispering her name to one another. This form of disciplinary power, argued by Foucault (1980) '...reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their action and attitudes, their discourses... everyday lives' (Foucault, 1980: 39).

It became perfectly clear that the children had become accustomed to the school system. They had local knowledge, being able to tune into the non-verbal cues of teachers, such as silences and facial expressions. However, once the surveillance was gone, the compliance evaporated quickly. This contrasts with Foucault's (1977) idea of intrinsically-motivated behaviours emerging from surveillance. Whilst the children occupied the status of a compliant child in front of the adult, it lasted only as long as necessary.

In answer to question six - *What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition and change?* - Some children were in the thrall of resistance. For example during the tour of the school, they went into spaces where they were not permitted to go (with the exception of the staff room) and touched objects that appeared almost out of reach – on one occasion climbing on the teacher's desk and bringing down an artefact from a shelf. The children explored the object and laughed conspiratorially, knowing that within the daily exercise of power they would have limited options to explore such objects.

The children concealed their resistance when an adult from the school was present – they were peaceful respecters of the institution and did not openly rebel. However, from my observations they had learned to clothe their resistance to disguise their purposes. I concluded, that most of the children largely observed 'the rules' even if it was their objective to undermine them (Bernstein,1999; Thornberg, 2008; Bosio, 2012).

The following example will illustrate how children have a remarkable capacity to respond to the authoritative discourse, even when they may not appear to have a voice (White, 2016). The teacher had stalked the classroom, displaying her power, shouting out clear instructions on the task the children were to do and how they were to do it:

*...My role was to sit at the table, turn over each spider 'body' where each child had previously written their name. I was to call out the name of the child. Each child would then come and put their spider together, using glue. I began my task. The children came over one by one and put their spider together according to the instructions they were given. Hazel arrived, began her task, looked up at me and smiled and said 'I am going to add ten legs.' And she meticulously did. In me Hazel knew she had found a benevolent ally, one who would honour her gestures and not disclose her open defiance. I thought her brave (Field notes, October 2012 – Westfield School).*

Here one glimpses the subordinated Hazel going up against the perceived power holder (in the teacher), refusing to abide by the rules. This, according to Moore (2002), counts as resistance. It was abundantly clear that Hazel gleefully subverted or ignored the teacher's instructions. The stakes were high as Hazel took control of the activity, as much as was possible, and went against the teacher's controlling tactics. Hazel made the choice to assert herself, despite the potential for ridicule, used at various times by the teacher when a child displayed any purposeful subordination. Despite knowing this, Hazel had a goal and subsequently put her plan into action. One insight to glean from Tisdall and Punch (2012) is that children choose when to assert themselves and to repress their critical voices. In the following example, one child upholds his own agenda and publicly challenges the teacher (not a common experience in this particular classroom):

*...The children had everything they needed to complete this task, except the glue stick, which was in another part of the room. The room was quiet as all the children concentrated on their task. Colouring in, not going over the thick black lines. When the cutting out began there was some quiet chat around the tables. A chair got pushed back. Philip got out of his seat and walked towards the art area. 'What are you doing out your seat?' shouted the teacher. All*

*the children looked round at Philip. Philip responded by saying sincerely and assertively, 'You asked us to colour in and cut out our picture. I've done that. I am now going for the glue stick.' He continued to walk towards the glue stick with the knowledge he had followed his instructions, picked one up and returned to his seat. The teacher did not comment, but merely watched Philip as he carried out his task (Field notes, September 2012 – Westfield School).*

Here, the teacher was unprepared for Philip's response. Perhaps, as I indicated earlier, teachers are more used to non-negotiable, one-way adult knowledge, rather than relationships between two actors, teacher and child. According to Alderson (2013), 'Half-formed theories of teaching and learning have... concentrated on teaching but have seldom fully understood children to be active agents. And learning involves transformative changes, whereas teaching does not necessarily do so' (Alderson, 2013:79).

In this school, power over children, in terms of what was taught and learned, and how it was taught and learned, was led by the adults. The remarkable fact may be that Philip's assertive behaviour took the teacher by surprise – she was more used to giving commands than be challenged by children who, typically, lived under 'a veil of compliance' (Fisher, 2011). Philip's compelling performance brought an interesting reaction from the teacher.

Despite Philip's experience, not all children openly resisted the teacher in the classroom. Perhaps unsurprisingly, away from the school hierarchy, the children's discourses included changes they would make to the school:

*'I find I like learning, if I am not told what to write, but I am told what type of things to write, it is really annoying.'*

*'I would like it if there was a room where you could play board games and stuff, an area where you could do other things.'*

*'I would like it if we had other subjects in school, I am getting a little tired of... [Cloud-Ace hesitated as if he did not know how to elaborate what he wanted to say]. I would like science and chemicals instead of writing stories. Generally different subjects.'*

*'I think the children should have a bit more time to tell the teacher things they find tricky and things like that.'*

*'I'd rather I didn't have homework, because it is like "do your homework, do your homework, do your homework" (laughs), children never get a moment's peace, except maybe a few minutes in the weekend...'*

*'Well the other thing is I don't feel [we] should have to wear school uniform, because it makes me uncomfortable, my mum would let me, but others wouldn't.'* (Cloud-Ace, 6 years, June 2013 – Northfield School).

Cloud-Ace's feeling was that he was restricted by the rigidity of formal learning. This complaint has been raised as an issue by other researchers (Einarsdottir, 2010, 2011, and Huf, 2013). Cloud-Ace's resistance comes from a desire to challenge and change the practices of the institution (Routledge, 1997). Gardiner (2016) believes everything is subsumed into oppression and exploitation. In disagreement with Gardiner, children do find alternative paths. Children cannot wait for a revolution – when it comes they will no longer be children, they have to challenge the present. In the sequestered social site of the interview space, away from school and in the company of other children, Cloud-Ace used the opportunity to suggest change. Also present were Clary and Superman, who were close confidants and shared similar experiences and views:

*'It is hard to look after sometimes. Sometimes you might have school uniform, but they might not go together – so are on the railings', said Superman*

*'Some are on the railing drying?' I clarified.*

*Superman nodded but looked sad, so I asked, 'And does that worry you?'*

*Superman nodded (Superman interview, June 2013 - Lilybank).*

While Superman might be less active in elaborating her resistance to wearing school uniform, we have no way of knowing (unlike Cloud-Ace) if her opinion had spilled beyond the sequestered confines of the interview. However, she was, in this instance, a vector for its propagation. While the strongest evidence comes from Cloud-Ace, Superman adds to this by expressing similar views.

The aim that children ‘belong’ to a particular school is often best accomplished by making them wear a uniform to look similar. However in high schools the school uniform can also be used by pupils to indicate superiority – prefects often wear a different tie, distinguishing them as the elite. Cloud-Ace’s school’s expectation is that all children must wear uniform. Direct refusal is dangerous and likely to result in punishment. By raising this as an issue, Cloud-Ace was challenging one of the fundamental codes of the school. At the end of the school year Cloud-Ace stopped wearing his uniform. He said:

*‘I think that people should be able to wear clothes that they like. Some words I will never forget are WHY FIT IN WHEN YOU WERE BORN TO STAND OUT [Cloud-Ace’s emphasis]. I like seeing people that all look different but if they’re all the same it fades away. My parents had arguments with me. I did this because I like wearing my own clothes, because they free up movement so that I don’t get as distracted, also I think adults all over the world think as I do. So that EVERYONE LOOKS DIFFERENT IN SCHOOL (Cloud-Ace, April, 2016 – Northfield School).*

Cloud-Ace writes of the tactical struggle with his parents and the school, but keen to replace authoritarian principles, Cloud-Ace convinced his parents to allow him not to wear the uniform.

Finally, but significantly, the concern children expressed about disciplinary mechanisms featured greatly in this research. Children being exploited through punishments promoted energy and passion in all the children, whether they had personally been punished or not. Children’s dignity is a very public attribute – any indignity is compounded when it is publicly experienced in a classroom of peers. My confidence in making this claim came from the children – children being disciplined and the mechanisms implemented have to change.

For that reason, I have ended this section with indignities expressed by the children:

*You get a warning, then another warning, then you get five minutes out... so I don’t think it is fair – because you could just write things they could not do to remind them because they have worked*

*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday...* (Me Me, 6 years, June 2013 – Southfield School).

*'Sometimes when children don't be nice they have to stay in with the head teacher that means they don't get out. I don't really like that. Two people in my class normally have that happen quite a lot (said with emphasis)'* (Bella, 6 years, June 2013 – Eastfield School).

Scott (1990) claims that 'Resistance...originates...from the pattern of personal humiliations' (Scott, 1990:112). As discussed in detail in Chapter Five, children are personally humiliated through subjective discipline mechanisms. Gallagher (2004) argued the importance of discipline in the classroom. However, it would, in my opinion, be more respectful to the child if discipline occurred in private rather than through public humiliation.

As indicated by Me Me and Bella, public humiliation is injurious to the child being disciplined, but also had an impact on the other children. The classroom is a social source for children's self-esteem. Being told off publicly is likely to affect the way children view themselves and how others view them (again the reader may remember how William's view of himself altered).

Teaching practice is bolstered by legislation such as United Nations on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the *Children and Young People's (Scotland) Act (2014)*, which emphasise the importance of respect. However, Me Me and Bella were not of the view that all children were treated respectfully at school. The imposed discipline bred indignation in the children. Me Me thought it was unfair that a child could do something considered 'wrong' on Monday, then behave for the rest of the week, and still be punished on Friday. Me Me's solution was that *'They could just write something'*, a punishment that would fit the crime (so to speak).

In the second example, Bella expressed resentment that children got kept in and she noted it happened to two children in particular, leaving a mark on their personal dignity. Me Me and Bella's examples say much more about children needing to be controlled in the classroom (Gallagher, 2004). They tell us that children suffer personally through practices which arouse their indignation and reveal the suppressed anger of the other children as they observe their peers' punishment. Scott

(1990) argues that it is through those experienced indignations that resistance emerges.

## Conclusions of Chapter Six

The research questions addressed in this section were:

1. *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?*
6. *What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition and change?*
7. *How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?*

This section began by analysing data from various professionals, teachers and head teachers. What emerged was that coercion, it would seem, can (and does) generate compliance – but it effectively inoculates the complier against doing so willingly. In answer to question seven - *How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?* - the teachers illustrated that they were reflexive to change. They wanted freedom to be more creative, specifically in areas of the curriculum and assessment. The teachers congregated in secret assemblies, such as primary heads' meetings, to discuss the lack of freedom they had with matters affecting their school. This manifested itself in opposition, such as making the council wait. The school might be said to privilege teachers but what emerged was that the teachers often felt powerless, which unavoidably entailed resistance.

In answer to question one - *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?* - the data from this section illustrated that children and family members were aware of school policies, particularly in areas of the curriculum and homework. However, it was shown that parents, in particular, did not necessarily agree with certain policies and how they impacted on the child and family life. The parents did not collectively defy the school's power holders, nor were the parents in complete hegemonic defiance, but they were somewhere in between. Some parents commented on finding it difficult to interpret the policies in practice, believing them cryptic and opaque, such as the rules



of the school. One parent intended to infiltrate the parents' council with dissent and self-assertion to make changes.

In answer to question six - *What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition and change?* - here I discovered that children wore guises. They had grasped the art of political disguise, moving between being compliant and being free easily. The children illustrated their experimental spirit in going against teachers' orders and changing behaviours outside surveillance. What has to be confronted, however, is the ideological debate about justice and dignity. We have heard from the children that the classroom can be a place that is very threatening and arbitrary. What has not been explored in any great depth in this thesis is what lasting impact indignity could have on their self-esteem, when they are publicly punished. It is impossible in this writing to assess this manipulation. I would argue that, whilst the children in this study found a variety of ways to resist successfully, I have no way of knowing if this will continue as they progress through school.

The following section collates all the summary points from Chapters Four, Five and Six. The summary points and the subsequent discussion will inform the reader of the questions that have been answered in this thesis.

## Chapter 7: Synthesis and conclusions

I began this thesis with the core claim that children's verbal and non-verbal dialogue on transition could influence the processes. Given the privileged nature of adults' views on transition I also acknowledged that children's voices can be constrained when they are located within a monologic discourse. In this location children often live with adult-driven agendas. It was therefore my intention to honour children's voices.

I took the view that an ethnographic methodology would yield insights since it comprised of living alongside children as they experienced transition. I asked the following fundamental questions:

1. *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?*
2. *Are professional approaches to transition flexible or rigid?*
3. *How do children navigate the complexity of transition?*
4. *How fluid are the power relations in transition?*
5. *What happens when children arrive at school?*
6. *What do children resist and what does this resistance tell us about transition and change?*
7. *How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?*

It is my purpose in this closing section to draw together the arguments I have made. I will begin by summing up what I have revealed in each chapter and illustrate how those findings answered the questions. This is followed by implications for policy and practice, as well as for future research. The chapter ends with concluding reflections.

### 7.1 Summary of findings and answering the research questions

In Chapter Four, I asked questions one - *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?*- and two - *Are professional approaches to transition flexible?*- I began with an overview of the national and local

transition policies. I argued that what happens in education is informed by policy; and that policy, and its interpretation by professionals, affected the lived lives of children and their families (Davis & Smith, 2012; Sher 2013).

This finding is in accord with other researchers, such as Elmore, (2004); Bogard & Takanishi, (2005); Dunlop & Fabian, (2007), Tisdall et al., (2009). Through a succession of empirical examples, parental correspondence and local and national documentation, I illustrated that the voices of children and their parents were not routinely included in transition policy formation, resulting in them being excluded from the process. This was particularly notable with reference to children's age and school starting times (Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Perry et al., 2000; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009; Peters, 2003; 2010a; Griebel & Niesel, 2013).

School starting age, it emerged, was fundamental to transition (Cronic & Lamberty, 1994). With some children accepting that when they were five years old they would go to school, it was their *rite of passage* (Vizedom & Caffè, 2010), while other children expressed they would appreciate more say in *when* they started school. This is important, as children were verbally articulate on why they wanted or did not want to go to school – the reasons they gave were rational and logical (Tisdall, Davis & Prout, 2006; Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009). This suggested that children proactively made decisions about their preferences in going to school.

In connection with this, my analysis showed that policy-makers made assumptions about what children could do at a specific age and subsequently children were homogenised (Sher, 2013). Policy-makers argued that the age of the child indicated their ability or capability to attend school (Mooney, 2015). I focused in particular upon the deferral systems in place and the formal written applications made by parents to the local authority.

One of the main objectives of the deferral system was reduced deferrals in the forthcoming year. Here I discovered a flaw in the system from a children's rights perspective: policy-makers and those in authority (people unknown to the child) made life-changing decisions. This illustrated a clear example of power exercised over children and parents as an increasing number of requests were refused annually (Small, 2011).

Further, it emerged that transition policies in early years settings and schools, although well intended, were not enacted. It is important to note that this lack of enactment was not due, in any respect, to the professionals involved. Through my analysis it became obvious that professionals were unable to do all that was asked of them because of pressures on their time (Stephen, 2006).

The first question was answered in Chapters Four and Six. I concluded that children and family members do make connections between theory, policy and practice.

Some children and parents revealed their knowledge in areas such as physical and psychosocial growth, and dependencies and vulnerabilities, relating this knowledge to the ideologic horizon of what it means to become a child who fits into the school system. This connected children and parents' ideas to societal goals and dominant authoritative discourses in education, such as developmental psychology (Woodhead, 2006). I hypothesised that some parents who applied for something outwith normal regulatory practices, such as a request for a later school start, found themselves oppressed within the current monologic system (Mooney, 2015; Sweet, 2015). As a result, parental requests were frequently overlooked, quashed or ignored by authoritative decision-makers (I refer here to denied requests for our two four-year-olds Peter and Thomas the Tank Engine). Deferral requests were passed to people unknown to them and subsequently rejected.

As argued by Davis and Smith (2012), children and their parents should be fully involved in the consultation process. The consequences of rejected deferrals were highly significant to the children and the families, but of no consequence to the decision-makers, who believed '*that each child's needs can now be delivered in school*' (Sweet 2015). I return to this point, and the implications of this belief in the sections that follow.

In response to the second question - *Are professional approaches to transition flexible?* - the data in Chapter Four suggests that there is room for more flexible approaches, especially in relation to how policy is interpreted and enacted (Davis & Smith 2012). As mentioned above, the local authority asserted that most children will have their needs met in school and therefore took a stance of reducing deferred placements (Small 2011). This suggests a lack of flexibility and does not take into

consideration the differences and diversity of children (Margetts, 2000, 2002; Mundane & Giugni, 2006; Ames, Rojas & Portugal, 2010; Anderson & Cook, 2010; Gonzalez-Mena, 2010; Konstantoni, 2011; Kustatscher, 2015).

Chapter Four found that some children would like choice about *when* to go to school, and the local authority mostly ignores that aspiration. This finding illustrated an inflexible approach on the part of the local authority based on an adult-driven agenda. However, as I have stressed previously, frustration and a desire to change inflexible practices was expressed by most, if not all, of the teachers.

Some argued that children were too young to start school – however these teachers were not confident enough to broach their concerns with the local authority (Scott, 1987; 1990). They did not believe that they could challenge decisions for fear of losing their positions within the local authority. Some teachers even believed that if they challenged rigid processes they would never work for the local authority again. Whilst there was a yearning for change, I concluded, in a similar way to Davis & Smith (2012) that this was unlikely to happen unless an ethos of trust was created.

In Chapter Five, I answered questions three, four and five - *How fluid are the power relations in transition? - How do children navigate the complexity of transitions? - What happens when children arrive at school?* I shifted my focus away from transition policies to examine *power* – a disciplinary mechanism used in the school institution (Gallagher, 2004), and investigated the subset of classroom techniques which power relied upon, *surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation and regulation*. I examined Jennifer Gore's (1995) micro-practices of power as a way of conceptualising disciplinary techniques used in schools. Throughout I presented empirical examples from my fieldwork to demonstrate how the issue of power operated in the school lives of children (and adults).

Contrasting those classroom practices with Gore's (1995) analytics of power, I demonstrated that children very quickly learned 'political anatomy' (Foucault, 1977). - children's bodies swiftly became docile and docile bodies maximised social usefulness in the classroom. For example, there was an expectation that all the children would follow explicit instructions and behave similarly, such as putting up their hands up when they wanted to speak rather than speaking freely (Bernstein,

1999; Thornberg, 2008; Bosio, 2012).

In particular, I discovered that teachers implemented the various micro-practices and consequently exercised power over the children, regulating time, occupation of space, choice of clothing, meal times and even methods of social interaction. In short, the children learned to *fit into* linear systems and became their own guards, self-fulfilling representations of the institution (Foucault, 1977).

The examples I presented showed that authoritarian strategies for ordering and controlling children continue to be conventional and that order is imposed through fear, which can be physical, but mainly psychological. This finding was not new – Meighan and Harber (2007) also made this discovery. National initiatives have sought to utilise changes in policy to be more participatory in their practice (such as *SAGBIS*, 2013). However, my finding suggests that little progress has been made in terms of participation and listening to children’s voices in the schools I worked in.

In Chapter Five, I further argued that under the current system there is little room for children’s creativity and sense of agency (Davis et al., 2012; Davis, McNair & White, forthcoming) and the purpose is to persuade children to comply with school systems and abide by the rules (Thornberg, 2008). My field work experience has improved my understanding of what open-ended education might look like and how adults carry adult agendas, as well as of how children can resist such agendas. I am inclined to wonder what the classroom would look like if dialogic pedagogy existed and children participated in the making of those rules, and even if the word ‘rules’ could be exchanged for ‘values’ (Apple, 2011).

However, it is important to stress that none of the professionals in this study used discipline in a malevolent way – raised voices and ways of coaxing children into coercion were, mostly, intended to benefit their pupils. Overall, the children accepted the disciplinary mechanisms without argument. Tisdall and Punch (2012) purport that children choose when to assert their agency – I regularly observed children accepting that teachers would tell them what to do.

In answer to the question - *How fluid are the power relations in transition?* - the data suggested that power relations could have been more flexible. Mechanisms such as *surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation* and *regulation* (Gore, 1995) were regularly carried out

by professionals and selected to ensure children complied and teachers could teach effectively. Chapter Five began to highlight the children's ability to resist mechanisms such as regulation e.g. it pointed out that *all* the children questioned the use of Golden Time, with many claiming it was unfair (Elsely & McMellon, 2010). My conclusion is that mechanisms of regulation such as Golden Time should be reviewed with a view to abolishing their use. While power mechanisms existed on all five sites, *Lilybank, Northfield, Southfield, Westfield and Eastfield*, some sites used *more* of one mechanism and *less* of another (Gore, 1995). Chapter Five argued that in some sites I could immediately experience and *feel* power relations, whereas in others they were more subtle. I also observed that in the everyday life experiences of the children, their bodies could be 'controlled' simply by a look from an adult (Foucault, 1977). This was typified when the children took me on a tour of the school – their bodies tightened and they immediately changed from running to standing with their arms by their sides (Corrigan, 1991).

I stated that, in my considered opinion, a chaotic environment would benefit no one and so to some degree I believe that some mechanisms are necessary. However, I have argued that the current power relations in place privilege some, silence others, and at times deny the existence of others. The results of this work put forward the view that this outcome is unacceptable and that power dynamics should be negotiated with children and adults.

I also answered the question - *How do children navigate the complexity of transitions?* - This thesis showed the many complex ways in which children negotiated transition. Fundamentally children reported challenges with regards to using the facilities, but this was not a new finding, others have reported similar issues, for example Cassidy (2005). However, my thesis is innovative in pointing to the ways in which the children develop individual coping strategies to adapt within the mechanisms of power.

Children also reported knowledge of how the classroom was organised around power relationships (something they were made aware of prior to starting school). The children quickly knew where they stood in terms of power. The reader may remember the response from Alba's mother emerging from the disciplining mechanisms in place:

*‘Whilst she is confident that she will never [said with emphasis] move from the sun it concerns her when others do. I am concerned that if she was ever moved from the sun she would be disproportionately upset and affected’ (Parent interview, August 2013 – Eastfield School).*

It may be speculative to suggest, as I did not ask this question directly, that Alba lived with uncomfortable moments and concern every day in class. Do we really want that for our children? Alba’s example was not unique – I discovered other occasions where some children wanted power dynamics arbitrated, while others believed that by reporting the *wrongdoing* of other children, it would somehow be the desired behaviour and result in praise of sorts for the accuser.

Overall, the children coped with the academic work, although some resented having homework. Some parents also found homework a pressure along with all the other changes school brought. If the children did not do the homework, they were not complying with the teachers’ expectations of the school child, and therefore the children were keen to do it.

The example from Lily would also suggest that a more interactive classroom would support her learning, as she regularly found herself being punished for expressing her opinions. To sum up, some children learned to navigate the complexity of the classroom by being compliant within the institution’s procedures and other devices of political rationality, while others were still discovering how to fit in.

The final question in Chapter Five asked - *What happens when children arrive at school?*

I discovered that baseline testing – which takes place a few short weeks after the children arrive – is in place to meet the needs of the educative system and not necessarily the children (Jeffrey & Woods, 2003). Children are grouped according to the results of the tests. This finding allows me to assert that schools are not neutral educational sites. Hierarchies and privilege are conferred along the lines of status markers, such as when children were graded by who did well (and not so well) in academic subjects. For example, I wrote about children’s jotters being on display. It



was argued that this strategy is used as a motivational factor for children. I would disagree – children were made aware of their position and although it happened occasionally, it was rare for a child to progress into another group. As I have argued throughout this work, teachers under pressure from time constraints did not have time to read transition reports, which may have shown each child's individual strengths. Instead the same information was delivered to all children, fundamentally on topics of literacy and numeracy. The children were, therefore, shaped into certain ways of thinking, being and doing. There was no opportunity for children to bring different perspectives into the classroom and for these to be a source of dialogic pedagogy.

Davis et al., (2012) variously point out that it is of critical value that school classrooms explore more relevant and creative inclusive methods. This is in accord with research findings from Edington (2004). However, Troman and Woods (2001) argue this should not be simplistically interpreted as teachers not wanting to change, but that they do not have the autonomy to be independent as they are accountable to the local authority. This suggests that, although some teachers would be keen to make changes to their teaching and delivery, they did not feel in a position to do so.

As a consequence, I have argued that when children arrive at school they are treated as neutral, fixed entities to be institutionalised in the broadest sense. From this standpoint, children's individual capacities are under-explored in this industrialised system. The beginning of school life is marked by stratagems and tactics that aim to establish and sustain classification and ordering of children – this is to the detriment of the individual child.

However, I also argued that professionals too believed themselves to be powerless at times, as they were constituted and constricted by normalising discourses. Still, I did discover that no social order can ever be absolute and there will always be resistance. This was explored in the following chapter.

In Chapter Six, I examined *power and resistance*. I answered questions one, six and seven - *How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process? - How do children resist? - Do children and their family members make connections to theory, policy and practice?*

I found that, overall, transition involves totalisation and resistance and that – in

agreement with Barbaret, (1985); Laclau & Mouffe, (1985); Foucault, (1990); Laclau, (1991) and others – an acceptance of power does not preclude resistance. Some children, parents and professionals either ignored or hindered its proper operation. This section began by analysing data from various school professionals – what emerged was that coercion, it would seem, can (and does) generate compliance, but it effectively inoculates the complier against submitting willingly.

In answer to question seven: *How reflexive are staff to the potential for change in the transition process?* - the teachers illustrated that they were reflexive to change. They desired freedom to be more creative, specifically in areas of the curriculum and assessment. The teachers congregated in secret assemblies, such as primary heads meetings, to discuss the lack of freedom they had with matters affecting their school, such as assessment policies. This lack of freedom manifested itself into reactions of opposition such as making the council ‘wait’. The school institution might be thought to privilege teachers but what emerged was the finding that the teachers often felt powerless, which unavoidably entailed resistance.

In answer to question six - *What do children resist and what does this tell us about transition and change?* - children chose when to follow and when not to follow instruction. In this way, the mechanisms the teachers used failed to totally achieve their purpose (Cassidy, 2005). However, any sign of *rebellion* by children was rare. This suggests the children did not have the autonomy to be independent but neither were they passive recipients.

Interestingly, resistance did not necessarily lead to conflict, instead the children found creative ways to limit power. I discovered that the children wore guises. The children had grasped the art of political disguise, as they moved between being compliant and being free. The children illustrated their experimental spirit in going against teachers’ orders, changing behaviours outside surveillance. A surprise of this study was that professionals and parents resist their own issues too, and were sometimes won over, or colluded with, children’s resistance.

Whilst question one - *Do children and their family members make connections between theory, policy and practice?* - was answered in part in Chapter Four, it was also important here. There was no doubt that children and parents made connections to theory, policy and practice. From the outset parents were informed of the *CfE*

(2004) and the links to homework tasks and subsequently the impact this would have on parents and, of course, children. Some children and parents did turn to resistance in order to decrease the authority the school had over them (White, 2014). For example, some parents and professionals challenged the way the *CfE* (2004) was executed, arguing that the pedagogy was formulaic.

The children illustrated an understanding of how pedagogy impacted on their experiences and subsequently found ways to thwart or reformulate adult authority (Tallant, 2015). Thus, children were aware that pedagogy restricted the authority they had over themselves, such as the wearing of the school uniform. However, we discovered through Cloud-Ace, that some children found ways to resist. What this section showed was that children and parents are capable of continuing their choices in the face of significant resistance and penalty (Basham, 2010).

## 7.2 Implications for debate, literature, policy and practice

What, if anything, does this add to the literature I examined in Chapter Two? I believe that my discoveries connect in two ways. The first is theoretical, and builds on the scholarship of those who advocate *listening to children* (e.g. Nutbrown, 1996; Neaum & Tallack, 2002; Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Curtin & Clark, 2000; Alexander et al., 2006; Hill, 2006; Tisdall, Davis & Prout, 2006; Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009; Kellett, 2010; Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Cairns, 2011 and others). During my time studying for this thesis I am also grateful for the application of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895 - 1975) ideas.

Bakhtin's orientation is 'towards language in all its many forms and it is important to remember when Bakhtin speaks of language he is not simply talking about words. He invokes the body in all its forms' (White, 2016:24). My findings enable me to conclude that any discussion regarding *listening to children* can only be enhanced by his philosophical ideas on dialogism and indeed he enables me to pose a challenge to Foucault in terms of how we enable change in educational settings – Foucault has enabled me to highlight the issues in schools but Bakhtin has enabled me to begin to think about the solutions to those issues – but I would like to point out that this thesis has only recently engaged with Bakhtin's ideas (having been found in

the data analysis stage of the research) and that my future research will seek to articulate in greater detail how to utilise him to find solutions to rigid power relations in schools. I have therefore tried to weave Bakhtin into this work, where dialogue has become the main focus (Apple, 2011; Gardiner, 2016). White (2016) argues that: ‘Up until now dialogic pedagogy in the early years has received very little attention. However, in her view ‘...there is much to be gained from examining its treatment in these more traditional educational spaces’ (White, 2016:33). As mentioned earlier, *Lilybank* professionals described a dialogic approach when explaining their ethos. It is therefore prudent to weave dialogism into this final discussion.

I have also attested that both Foucault and Bakhtin have much to offer in a combined way to transition processes, e.g., in the way transition is interpreted and en-acted.

My work makes a positive and innovative contribution, both substantive and theoretical, to empirical research concerned with the transition of young children by specifically adding that the concept of power to discussing concerning transition processes. From the outset I was concerned with children’s perspectives, both verbal and gestural, on transition. Throughout, the children illustrated that they were experts on their own lives who could give reliable testimonies on their school experience (Tisdall et al., 2012). Furthermore, the children were able to make suggestions about what could be done differently at school, particularly in relation to the disciplining mechanisms used, which the children claimed were unfair (Elsely & McMellon, 2010).

Most of the children did not complain about the school workload, although some thought more changes could be made to liven up the teaching content delivered in class. The literature on listening to children, in particular, has been influential within policy, for example the *Children and Young People’s (Scotland) Act (2014)*. I hope that this work will add to it by encouraging professionals to consider how dialogue and co-construction can be further stimulated in schools.

Furthermore, where transitional research is dominated by researchers observing children in one setting, my research looks at children (known to me) in different settings, in early years and four separate primary schools, scattered across one city. Any small scale study has problems being generalised and applied as a universal

truth – I have sought in each findings chapter to highlight the complexities of the data and provided spaces for counter narratives. The main difference in settings was between *Lilybank* and the various schools – however I have also identified differences within schools and between schools. The central value of this thesis lies in its ability to explore and gain insight into children’s perspectives on transition and to highlight the barriers to *listening to children* and *dialogism* in schools.

### **7.3 Listening to children – a dialogic approach**

This thesis was designed to include children’s thoughts, feelings, and ideas on transition (MacNaughton, 2003). Therefore, *listening to children as a dialogic approach* formed the basis of this thesis. The intended aim was that this research could be used to develop locally-employed policies and practices which would be shaped by input from children, making policy and practice more relevant (Snape & Spencer, 2003; White & Peters, 2011).

Throughout I made ‘use of children’s own vocabulary and formation’ (Christensen, 2004: 171). There was no attempt to reorganise their sentence structure or grammar. The responses I captured truly reflected what the children actually said (White, 2016).

Listening to children was highlighted in the literature in Chapter Two and discussed in more depth in the methodology, Chapter Three. Listening to children is rooted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC), where children have the right to be heard and taken seriously. According to Cairns (2011) listening can take many forms, from consultations to full participation. Cairns (2011) argues that listening to children demonstrates the first step in enacting their right to be heard. The second step is that what the children have to say is responded to by an action – through dialogue there is change (Cairns, 2011). For Cairns (2011), children should be engaging with adults and fully contributing, as meaning is never fixed and children have much to give (Wergerif, 2007).

I have argued in Chapter Four that policy impacts on practice. Since this study began, significant changes have taken place with regards to policy. The Scottish

Parliament<sup>6</sup> and the Scottish Government made a declaration of principles, policies and objectives, claiming that Scotland will be *the* best place for children to grow up (*Growing up in Scotland*, GUS, 2014). The *Children and Young People's (Scotland) Act (2014)* has been one of the major legislative enactments of the Scottish Parliament directly concentrating on children's rights, children's services and the well-being of young children and young people.

These changes should, if enacted as they were proposed, impact on how policy-makers *listen* to and respond to children. My findings show that little has changed in practice. Davis *et.al.*, (2014) writing on the *Children and Young People's (Scotland) Act (2014)* say that it does not provide a robust statutory foundation for action by policy-makers with regards to listening to children. Cairns (2011), argues that *all* educational experiences should be characterised by the fundamental idea that dialogue should effect change.

The *Children and Young People's Scotland Act (2014)* is based upon the belief that a statutory foundation is required for *Getting It Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC, 2008), children's rights, early learning and childcare, and the care system (Sher, 2013). If this is so, then children's rights to be heard on transition (and other matters affecting children), should be listened to and acted upon. This study showed that children had much to say on transition – however children were mainly ignored.

Unfortunately, the flaws in the *Children and Young People's (Scotland) Act (2014)*, predicted by Davis *et al.*, (2014), endure. Children are still not listened to, as Chapter Four of this thesis highlighted, for example when Thomas the Tank Engine stated he did not want to go to school – his parents listened, but the decision-makers did not. The decision on whether Thomas the Tank Engine went to school or not was made by people unknown to the child. The parents questioned how this was 'Getting It Right for *their* Child'. Neither the child or the parents had access to independent advocacy as policy-makers made decisions on their behalf (Chapter Four, section 4.1).

This calls into question the exact nature of the powers of decision-makers, who

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<sup>6</sup> A referendum held in September 1997 produced clear majorities for the creation of a Scottish Parliament. The Scotland Act 1998 was passed, and The Scottish Office set up a cross-party Consultative Steering Group to produce more detailed proposals for the procedures and practices of the new parliament.

make critical rulings about children's lives. What emerged in this study was that children's voices were, at times, drowned out by public agendas, with the local authority committed to reducing deferred nursery placements in order to meet budget requirements (Small, 2011). This resulted in some parents claiming that policy-makers did not listen to their child. According to the Scottish Commissioner for Young Children this finding is not unusual. He says:

*'... children's rights however are still too often ignored and their voices are lost and there is much more that can and must be done to ensure that Scotland is fully compliant with the UNCRC' (The Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2015:2).*

The UNCRC, which states nodal significance to *listening to children*, is not yet fully incorporated into Scottish law. As the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014)* does not place a duty on the public sector to have due regard to the UNCRC in Scotland, it may come as no surprise to the reader that *listening to children* continues to make little impact.

However, having said that, public authorities, such as the local council where this research took place, must distribute a report of steps to secure and promote better and more effective policies and actions which include the UNCRC requirements.

However, what has emerged from this study is that some of the local authority's domestic policies – such as on behaviour, where inequitable and inconsistent practices are implemented – directly contravene the UNCRC. The children made it clear that they thought disciplinary mechanisms were unfair and disproportionate (Chapter Five, section 5.1., 5.2).

Additionally, as mentioned above, it quickly became apparent that policies regarding deferrals excluded children and parents' views. A nodal, significant point was that adults who did not know the children made decisions about their lives, often against the wishes of children and their parents. Overall, there appears to be a lack of strategic oversight and coherence in terms of local policy. The Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People said:

*'Children and young people are not aware of their rights and their voices are not heard. My office is contacted frequently by children and young people and their families who are not being listened to or who are being ignored in decisions affecting them' (The Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2015:3).*

This statement is consistent with my findings – children and parents who fought for a deferred placement did not believe they were listened to. There was no strategic or cohesive approach to deferrals being applied across the councils, with some parents claiming it was *'a postcode lottery'*.

With regard to the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014)*, the Scottish Government must bring into being guidance for Scottish Ministers, and subsequently local authority policy-makers, on how to realise their duties relating to the voice and participation of children. It is hoped that by sharing my findings with the local authority, some changes with regards to transition will be made, which in turn, may support the local authority in achieving the Scottish Government goal of *listening* to the voices of the children.

All the children need now is adults who are willing to listen.

#### **7.4 Children's perspectives on transition**

This thesis also makes a positive contribution to the wealth of transition literature, most of which has been discussed in various degrees throughout this research. The study to which my own research is closest is that of Dockett and Perry's (2007) work. Their focus, like mine, is upon the inclusion of children's voices in the transition process. However, this study has identified that *power* in relation to transition is not covered in the literature.

By involving children's perspectives, this thesis has generated insight into transition and discovered that *power* must be considered when discussing the process. Gallagher's (2004) thesis, *Producing A Schooled Subject*, carefully examined power in the school context and made similar findings to my own. However, my knowledge of the children prior to going to school, and then by observing them in school, has heightened awareness and added a different perspective on how power impacted on them as they transitioned from one setting to



another.

For example, in *Lilybank* children were perceived not as passive recipients, but as political actors in their own right. However, this study shows that in the school classroom children were less actively involved, almost always waiting for instructions as they were ‘professionalised by well-meaning teachers who claim to know best’ (White, 2016:47).

What this study also revealed was that the teachers did not have time to get to know the children prior to starting school. Some had met the children once, others had no time to gather sufficient evidence on each child or get to know what their interests were. Subjects were taught that privileged logic and truth – there was little room for creativity or the individual interests of children. As Lobok explains:

In a broad sense, we professional educators are prepared – sometimes with an unaccustomed ease – to snuff out the world of children’s expectations for the sake of being able to create, in the child, the ability to make logical constructions. On the one hand, we always have ‘didactic goals and objectives’, with which we can account for ourselves in front of our auditing superiors. But does the child need our ‘didactic goals and objectives?’ (Lobok, 2012: 105).

Children were tested and grouped according to the ‘didactic goals and objectives’ of the school system and then positioned according to those groupings. Children’s identities changed as a result, with some being in the top groups, while others in lower groups expressed ‘*I’m useless*’ (Ninja Rock). This positioning at the outset impacted on the children’s self-worth. For almost all of the *Lilybank* children, this was a positive as they were in the top groups, but many other children were positioned as ‘lower’ than their peers.

The data illustrated that the children are profoundly affected by others. The children were keen to *fit in* to the school system if that meant acceptance. How the teacher ‘acts, speaks, enunciates, intonates, sounds, moves and orientates himself or herself plays a big part in the becoming of each child’ (White, 2016:48).

Power has to be considered when discussing children’s transition processes and I want to reiterate the following issues; i) children’s fear of the disciplinary processes; ii) how willingly children complied with the system.

Although there were examples of resistance, overall children learned to *fit in* to the school systems. Given our increased contemporary emphasis on the need for creative beings in society, I would conclude from the finding in Chapter Five that regulation inhibits creativity that if we wish to develop more creative young people – we have to develop more co-constructive and dialogic forms of pedagogy that listening to our children and collaborative plan transformational change. Further research should explore how dialogic pedagogy can be developed as an alternative way of develop a greater focus on children’s rights in transition processes.

### **7.5 Implications for further research**

My conclusion in relation to literature on transition is that we need to shift the focus way from dualism and binary concepts of transition such as discontinuity and continuity, good and bad, age appropriate and non-age appropriate, etc. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two focused on children’s experience of transition in early years and school settings – the central topic of this thesis. The thesis examined transition from a specific early years setting not attached to a primary school. Further research could explore how children transition from other early years settings, for example early years setting the are located within and attached to a primary school (e.g. that have a single philosophy and management system).

While it was the aim of this research to discover children’s perspectives on transition, an unexpected discovery was that disciplinary processes carried out in schools upset the children. Subjective reward and punishment system were used differently in the various schools. These mechanisms created the prisoner-inmate dynamic in the classroom, where children were under constant surveillance (Foucault, 1977). When consulted, children came up with their own disciplinary mechanisms. Children did not want to work in a chaotic environment but they also did not want to work in fear. In most cases this fear came out of concern for other children. Future action research could be employed to develop flexible frameworks with children that ensure schools are not chaotic but are also more participatory. This would require children and adults to balance the need for collective and

individual approaches.

Gallagher (2004) argues that discipline mechanisms are a necessity. While I do not necessarily disagree that some discipline mechanisms are useful, I would stress, as the children have, that they need modification and future research should work on what these modifications might be. Further research should be undertaken to explore the purpose of disciplinary mechanisms in school and to enable professionals to engage with the findings of other participatory studies that offered alternatives rigid professional working (e.g. Cairns, 2011; Bakhtin, 1993; White & Peters, 2011; White, 2016).

I had no idea, at the beginning of this study, how greatly discipline would feature in the amount of data generated. This area was of the greatest concern to the children. Future research needs to further examine the ideological debate about justice and dignity and help develop new ways of thinking about and doing transition.

We have heard from the children that the classroom can be a very threatening and arbitrary place. What has not been explored in any great depth in this thesis is what lasting impact indignity could have on the self-esteem of children who are publicly punished. It is impossible in this writing to assess this manipulation. I would argue that, whilst the children in this study found a variety of ways to resist successfully, I have no way of knowing if this will continue as they progress through school. Further research exploring how children cope with the mechanisms as they progress could usefully illuminate what strategies they develop in order to adapt to the system.

A comparative study of another school outside the United Kingdom, where children start later than ours, in less bounded and governed spaces might also provide insights in how to improve our understandings and practices of transition. I was not able to explore such locations in this study but I am very keen to do so.

Finally, another area that I believe would merit further investigation is gender segregation. This was not the focus of the research, although a number of parents who participated spoke of it as a concern. This aspect of study could be extended by more in-depth research into how boys and girls are integrated in school – similarly I have alluded to issues of disability and race in my data but I also intend to place more focus on thesis issues and an LGBT rights in my future research. Gaps such as

this are partially due to the building of knowledge that happens during the process of investigation. From this research I have learned that completing a doctoral study is only the beginning of the research journey as a great deal of data still sits in piles waiting to be interpreted.

## 7.6 Concluding reflections

The key contribution of this research has been to show that power is essential when considering transition processes. Power, both in totalising and resistance forms, plays a significant role in all aspects of transition, i.e., before the child starts school; what happens when the child starts school; and how the child negotiates school life. This study has highlighted that children raised many provocations about the school systems.

In his work *Producing a Schooled Subject*, Gallagher (2004) argues that the mechanisms in place in the current educational system need to exist as he could not think of an alternative approach. I would argue that a dialogic approach offers an alternative to the current education system.

My hope is that, when this thesis is disseminated, what the children had to say on transition will be honoured and will result in professionals and children being encouraged to work on processes of change. The children in this study continue to be in my life – we hope to find an ethical way of sharing the results together.

I would like to leave the reader with the words of one of the children keen to share some more *'facts'* with me:

*'Lynn, Lynn, I want to tell you another fact. I want to say that maybe we should stay in bed and not start school so early' (Superman, 5 years).*

This final quote sums up my thesis. Children have much to say on their unique lived lives. It is time to include their suggestions for alternative, fluid, open and unfinalised transition processes.



## Appendix



### Consent Form for Parents and Children

Fieldwork in Schools 08/12 - 05/13

#### 1. Information

I have read the information leaflet and understand that the head and staff in my child's primary school have agreed that the researcher may carry out relevant observation in my child's classroom.

#### 2. Participant observation - I will allow the researcher to:

Record observations of my child  (please tick)

Take photographs of my child  (please tick)

Take copies of my child's work  (please tick)

Make audio recordings of talks in the classroom  (please tick)

Video classroom activities\*  (please tick)

*This item will only be included if appropriate to common practice in the school*

#### 3. Group interviews with children- I give consent for:

My child to be interviewed  (please tick)

Interviews to be audio recorded  (please tick)

#### Please be assured that

•Information about my child will be stored securely and will only be used as part of the research

•My child's name will not appear in any report of the research

•My child does not have to participate and I can ask for my child to withdraw from the research at any time by contacting Lynn McNair for whom contact details are listed below.

•If I have any questions or concerns I can contact the researcher or speak to her while she is in the Centre. Details below.

Name (parent) \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Child) \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Researcher) \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### Contact Details

•Lynn McNair - lynnjmcnair@hotmail.co.uk

Should you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this project you can also contact Prof John Davis at Moray House School - john.davis@ed.ac.uk

## Consent form for parents and children

#### Will you know about the research results?

I will consult your child and you throughout the data collection process. Children will be invited to participate in the dissemination process. A copy of the results will be made available to you on request.

#### Contact details for any questions:

Lynn McNair lynnjmcnair@cowgate-nur.edin.sch.uk



### Information Sheet For Parents

Please Will You Help With My Research?

This leaflet tells you about my research. I hope the leaflet will also be useful, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

Please could you explain the research to your child and talk over whether they would want to take part. I will also explain to the children what I am doing in school and make it clear they are free to join in or not.

#### What is this research about?

'Rules, rules, rules and we're not allowed to skip' Is a doctoral study, concerned with listening to children about their transition to primary one. The fieldwork is being conducted across on early years setting and four primary schools.

The project is studying the early-years transition from early years to primary school. I am interested in children and parents experiences of the transitional experience.

When the children were in the early years setting I spoke to them about what they thought about going to school, what they thought they will do at school, did they think they would make friends at school, how did they feel about going to school, what did they want to do most of all at school and what is the name of their school. I am now planning to spend time in early years classrooms to observe the children in their new school; and interview children, parents and family members in their homes.

## Information sheet for parents about the research

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