# CHAPTER 4 :

# UNDERSTANDING TRANSITION:

# LITERATURE REVIEW

"*One studies foreign education not solely to know foreign peoples but also – and perhaps most of all – to know oneself*"
Bereday, 1964, p5-6

## 4.1 Introduction

Increasing numbers of young children in Ireland are attending pre-school programmes prior to starting formal schooling. Therefore their experience of beginning formal school is often a transition from the pre-school environment in which they are comfortable, to a new unfamiliar environment. As noted in Chapter 1, a lack of research on the transition from preschool to formal schooling in Ireland has been highlighted, with no published research in this area identified in the CECDE audit of Irish research (Walsh, 2003). With this in mind this review of available literature on the topic focuses mostly on international studies.

## 4.2 The Child During Transition: Attitudes and Beliefs

The period of transition is a time of rapid change in the life of a child (Margetts, 2000). With this change comes the challenge of adjusting to a new setting, often much larger than the preschool setting, a new teacher, and new classmates (Ladd & Price, 1987; Ladd, 1990; Margetts, 1999; Griebel & Niesel, 1999, 2000; Fabian, 2000). Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox (2000) reported teacher opinions that 16% of children have a difficult transition to school, with a further 32% having a moderately successful transition, as compared to 52% who experience a successful transition. Germino-Hausken & Rathbun (2002) reported similar findings with parents in their study reporting approximately 21% of children as exhibiting behaviours which showed a difficult adjustment to school. A recent study in the US (PNC Financial Services, 2007, 2007a) reported that 25% of parents compared to only 7% of teachers felt that American children are extremely well prepared to learn on entering kindergarten. This section examines the literature relating to attitudes and beliefs about children's experiences, and the challenges they face, during this transition.

### 4.2.1 Beliefs about the Challenges Children Face During Transition

Children questioned by Griebel & Niesel (1999) about the challenges they faced during transition, noted both class size, and the number of children in the whole school as being overwhelming. Both new relationships and the loss of relationships with preschool friends and teachers are also a focus of children at this time (Griebel &

Niesel, 2000). School adult:child ratios are much larger than those of the preschools, so children are mixing with a larger and more diverse group of children (Wolery, 1999, Fabian 2002). Ledger (2000) notes that the move from an environment with a large number of adults, to one with a little adult attention is one that emphasises discontinuities. She reported that children were very aware of the lack of adult attention in school. The buildings are also larger, and more challenging for children to become familiar with. Children may also have to become familiar with 'routes' through the new building, for example to the toilets, or to the playground (Cleave et al, 1982; Margetts, 1999). Ledger (2000) reported that challenges such as knowing what to do if confronted by older children, or when the bell rings, can be difficult for young children to negotiate.

At break and lunch times group size often increases once again, and the children must adapt to the school playground. Some children express a preference for outdoor activities (Clark & Moss, 2001), however for others the playground can be a daunting experience (Ledger, 2000; Smith, 2002). Moving from the order and security of the mostly adult-directed classroom to the less formal playground can provide challenges for children, particularly to those with less developed social skills. In this environment also comes the added task of dealing with children older than themselves and their classmates. Many schools in Ireland now have a separate playground area for the younger classes. However, the playground area is usually larger than the outdoor area that preschools work with, and is often only supervised by one member of staff. It can be a daunting place for the preschool child to face with little adult support. Ledger (2000) noted that as there are few teachers in the playground, most of whom are unfamiliar to new starters, asking for help can become a major issue for children. At times this can be too difficult a task to negotiate. Cleave et al (1982) report that the child new to the playground situation is "*typically a bystander rather than a participant*" (p138). Smith (2002) would support this and suggests that particularly for children who have not yet learnt to develop friendships, the playground can be a socially isolating place. She found that some children spend a lot of time on the sidelines watching rather than taking part, which can lead to loss of self-esteem.

The playground is also cited as being the place most likely for bullying to take place (Tattum & Tattum, 2000). Ladd (1990) suggests that victims for bullying are identified during the first phase of the school year, the time when children making this first transition to school are most vulnerable. Brooker & Broadbent (2007) note that from 5-7 years children's discourse becomes more sexualized and racialized, and that name-calling and other stereotyping can become common practice, particularly during unsupervised times, such as break times. They advise that damaging attacks on the identity and sense of self of individual children can occur at these times, and stress the importance of teaching staff acknowledging the dangers of bullying from the start of primary school. They recommend that teaching staff should take bullying, name-calling and racism seriously, and should also undertake social engineering on behalf of isolated children. Bullying has been identified as being a significant health issue, leading to long-term relationship problems (Pepler & Craig, 2007). It has also been identified that bullying peaks at time of school transitions (Pellegrini & Long, 2002).

Children also have to adapt to different teacher expectations in formal schooling (Rimm-Kaufman et al, 2000; Pianta & Cox, 2002). Hayes et al (1997) investigated the educational values and expectations of teachers in preschool and primary schools in Ireland, and found a more academic focus in schools, particularly those classified as disadvantaged. Primary school teachers were more likely to propose that children spend their time on preacademic activities, as compared to their preschool counterparts. A similar emphasis on academic skills in disadvantaged schools was found by Wright, Deiner & Kay (2000). Studies have shown that there is more verbal instruction at school than at preschool, and a much greater focus on literacy and numeracy (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Margetts, 2002). The academic expectations of parents can also become more emphasised on transition to school (Griebel & Niesel, 2001).

There are also more formal routines in school with which the children must quickly become familiar. Children are expected to behave in a way appropriate to school life, for example controlling their temper in a situation of conflict. They must listen to instructions, and act on them. They must co-operate with others, and wait their turn when necessary. The rules which they must adhere to are many, compared to the relative flexibility and freedom of preschool (Myers, 1997; Wolery, 1999). Myers

suggests that to comply with even one of these challenges can be difficult for a child, but when faced with so many new challenges at the same time the stress can be overwhelming. He warns that a vicious circle can develop where levels of stress mean that a child fails to perform well, he then becomes disaffected with learning, and develops a sense of failure.

### 4.2.2 Beliefs About the Changing Role of the Child During Transition

The role of the 'school child' is one that children have to adapt to on entry to the formal education system, and this role brings new challenges. Entwisle and Alexander (1999) suggest that one of the most important features of formal schooling is that in this setting children are rated according to how they compare with other children. In the past, children have often been compared to their own past record, however now, they must compete with their classmates. Competition not only covers academic ability, but also reaches to other levels, for example ability to please the teacher, and to predict others reactions. Children quickly realise that they are being evaluated and are aware that different children receive different reactions from teachers. However, they may be unclear as to what determines these reactions. Alexander & Entwistle (1988) suggest that some children have the temperament and inclination to slip easily into the role of pupils. These children, who quickly adjust to school life, get better marks than children who have difficulty adapting to school. Ledger (2000) also highlighted the changing role of the child making the transition from preschool to formal schooling as being of importance. She found that the children themselves recognised that their role was changing on entry to school, some anticipated this role change with pleasure, some with apprehension. Her findings suggested that children were aware of a loss of independence in the role of "school boy/girl" and they had to adapt quickly to this new role which necessitated that they act as the teacher directed. She suggested that this new role of the child in the classroom was of a quiet child, who worked hard, obeyed the teacher, and complied with instructions.

Griebel & Niesel (2000; 2001) conducted two studies in Bavaria questioning children on their experiences of transition to school. Not surprisingly, prior to school entry they reported that the children's beliefs about school were very vague. Even those

children who had visited a school did not report much factual information, although this may not be unexpected. Having attended school for some weeks, the children reported that it had often turned out different to their expectations. They were slightly overwhelmed by the numbers of children, and the number of new experiences they had encountered. They did not like the lack of autonomy, now they *had* to do things, as compared to preschool where they could *choose* to do things. The children appeared aware that the role of the school child was to obey the teacher and do what was asked of them, rather than the more self-directed role of the preschooler. In fact part of adapting to the role of school child means becoming accustomed to the rules of the classroom.

International research has shown that children are very aware of the rules which they must obey at school, and the reward and punishment systems in place (Perry, Dockett & Tracey, 1998; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Peters, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2003). Researchers have noted these school rules are many compared to the relative flexibility and freedom of preschool (Myers, 1997; Wolery, 1999). Although as Perry, Dockett & Howard (2000) note, children do not regard learning the rules as a negative aspect of school life. Rather they showed an acceptance that the rules were important to school life. Dockett & Perry (2002; 1999a) also found that children emphasised school rules and an understanding of school rules as being important to work within the school context. They suggested that children may respond to the new environment of school by seeking to familiarise themselves with the relevant rules and regulations in order to help them adjust to this new situation. They found that much of the emphasis on rules, was in order to "*keep out of trouble*" (p80). Dockett & Perry (2007) note that at preschool level often services use discipline approaches involving self-regulation or guidance on behaviour from a staff member. At school level this usually changes to more intricate reward and punishment systems. They suggest however, that this emphasis on rewards can impact on a child's perception of themselves and their peers. They cite a child in their study as explaining *"Walter is good and smart. I'm bad and smart. Michael is just bad"* (Dockett & Perry, 2007, p100). Clearly it is possible for children to believe that either they themselves, or other children in the class, are 'bad' if they are not achieving the same level of rewards as their classmates.

Dockett & Perry (2007) also remind us that both teachers and parents expect children to adapt to huge changes on entering school. They are expected to demonstrate greater levels of responsibility, independence, and self-regulation than are expected at home or preschool. They highlight the importance of considering the implications of such changes for children, and ensuring that overwhelming demands are not placed on them at the time of transition. They cite the ability of children to cope with these changes as highlighting their competence to adapt to new environments, but also suggest that adults need to reflect on the ways in which they can assist children with these changes. They warn against the dangers of the most experienced stakeholders in the transition process (the adults) expecting the least experienced stakeholders (the children) to make all the changes. The "Crossing Borders Centres of Innovation Project" in New Zealand (peters, 2007) suggests the use of 'portfolios' which are transferred from preschool to school as a useful tool to support children in adapting to the changes that they will have to face during this transition. The portfolio documents learning stories from the preschool environment, sometimes involving photographs of work accomplished (for example a child learning to write their name, or building something in the building area) which the children then bring with them to school. Often the stories would involve a first effort at a task, followed by further developments in learning. It was found that the use of portfolios helped to foster relationships between teachers and children, and between children themselves. Such an artefact may well prove a useful support to children during this period of change, in effect they represent a bridge between the preschool and school environments.

The 'buddy' system (Dockett & Perry, 2005a; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006) is another system recommended to support children during this time. These programmes aim to smooth the transition to school for children by providing peer support as children commence school. In the Australian programme, older (Year 5) buddies were provided with training which included communication and interactions skills, and student teachers co-ordinated and assessed the project. Dockett & Perry reported that the buddy system resulted in a very positive start of school for the younger buddies, while the leadership training provided for the older buddies also had very positive effects. The student teachers found their involvement to be a positive experience, while effects were also noted at community level.

### 4.2.3 Skills Necessary to Succeed in Formal Schooling

Ladd (1990) and Margetts (2000; 2000a) have stressed the need to identify predictors of children's adjustment to school. International research has noted that generally the skills identified by teachers as being of importance to children starting formal school are social skills; independence; language and communication skills; and the ability to sit, listen and concentrate (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman et al, 2000; Dunlop, 2003; Lin, Lawrence and Gorrell, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2004, 2005; Peters, 2007; PNC Financial Services, 2007; 2007a). As Wesley and Buysee report, teachers in their study suggested that if children could:

> "*interact meaningfully with each other and adults, follow simple rules and directions, and demonstrate some degree of independence in the classroom including expressing their wants and needs, then kindergarten teachers could teach them the other academic skills and knowledge they would need to be successful in school*" (2003, p357).

It is clear that the ability to take turns, share, anticipate change, and 'read' the teacher will increase positive experiences within the classroom (Fabian, 2002; Haas-Foretta & Ottolini-Geno, 2006). Such skills would support children dealing with the new rules and levels of negotiation which they have to learn in the school settings.

Recent research on the skills necessary to succeed in formal school comes from the PNC Study of Early Childhood Education in the United States (PNC Financial Services, 2007; 2007a) which questioned parents and teachers about their beliefs about these skills. The study found that teachers valued social skills, such as following rules and direction and being able to play and share over academic skills. Teachers said that children were lacking in the two most important skills that they should possess on entry to school, the ability to listen and follow rules and directions, and the ability to interact well with others. An Irish report (Preparing for Life Group, 2006) on school readiness in three disadvantaged areas of Dublin investigated teacher's views on the readiness of children who started in their schools in September 2004. The study found that teachers rated only 42% of the children as being ready for school. The children considered to be ready for school demonstrated independence skills, were able to follow teachers instructions and concentrate for short periods of

time. They were considered emotionally and socially ready for school, made friends easily and had good communication skills.

Language and communication skills have also been identified as being important skills to possess at primary level (DES, 1999). The primary school curriculum notes the importance of oral language, and an emphasis on oral language at infant stage is encouraged in the curriculum. However, researchers have noted that the discourse of the classroom is very different to the more informal discourse of home or preschool (Bernstein, 1996; Bourne, 2003). Berstein (1996) suggests that school works within a decontextualised, vertical form of discourse, while everyday knowledge is expressed in horizontal discourse which is more context dependent. Some children may find this move to more abstract language at primary level difficult to adapt to. Some researchers have suggested that children starting school before they are 5 years old may not have yet made the major shift in cognition that takes place between 5 and 7 years of age (Piaget, 1952; Sameroff & McDonough, 1994; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). If this is the case, these children may have more difficulty learning in abstract situations. Other researchers suggest that these younger children are also less likely to listen effectively to directions, and to comply with teacher demands (McLelland, Morrison & Holmes, 2000). Certainly, the preschool curricula discussed in Chapter 2 all promote active learning situations in which the child is using language in context. The primary school situation is more reliant on learning abstract concepts through decontextualised language and this may cause the children with less developed language skills to have greater difficulty adjusting to the primary school curriculum.

The issue of sitting still, listening and concentrating is a contentious one. Fabian (2002) notes that the ability to sit still is suggested to be the most advanced stage of movement, but she also found that the ability to sit still was identified as being of importance when starting formal schooling. Indeed, the INTO note that "*play, movement and noise is an integral part of the learning environment of young children, not just sitting or controlled in a structured way in classrooms*" (2006, p.73). However, many researchers have reported an expectation reported by children, that school children should be working quietly at their desks (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2004a; Sharp & White, 2005). These studies suggest that children

focus on play at preschool level, but in school they focus on work. This may in some way explain the different skill sets expected at the two educational levels.

### 4.2.4. Are Some Children More At Risk of Experiencing a Difficult Transition?

Many children adapt well to the transition to formal schooling and capably meet any challenges that this transition may bring. However, Dunlop (2004, 2007) has found that even for children identified as being creative and capable at preschool level, starting school can bring a dip in confidence during the first weeks and months. For other children starting school can clearly be identified as being a difficult experience. Brostrom proposes that for these children "*each day brings too many challenges or the wrong kinds of challenges*" (2000, p.3).

Researchers have suggested that various groups of children are more at risk than others of experiencing a difficult transition to school. The importance of preschool as preparation for school has been stressed by some, with significant benefits for children on arrival at school in terms of both social and academic skills (Margetts, 2002a). Others suggest that gender significantly predicts co-operation, self control, and higher levels of social skills during the first year of schooling, with girls having higher levels than boys in all of these areas, concluding that gender influences adjustment to formal schooling (Entwisle & Alexander, 1988; Zill, 1999; Margetts, 2002a). Children with additional needs have also been identified as being as risk of experiencing a difficult transition (Wolery, 1999). It has also been suggested that transition to formal schooling will be most difficult for the youngest children (Horgan, 1995; Atkinson, 2000; Brostrom, 2002; McInnes, 2002).

Internationally, low Socio-Economic Status (SES) has also been identified as a risk factor in terms of difficult transitions (Entwisle & Alexander, 1999; Yeboah, 2000, 2002; Brooker, 2002, 2005). Learning in school is a product of both the classroom and school environment, in tandem with the dispositions of each individual child towards learning, and their exposure to learning experiences. Children from disadvantaged families are often not prepared to cope with the demands of school, nor are schools or classrooms prepared to cope with the demands of these children. This can result in a situation where the characteristics of school and family are so disparate

that this first year of formal schooling is the start of a downward spiral to failure (Bowman, 1999). A number of early intervention projects have been established in Ireland aimed at children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and one of the considerations of these projects is the belief that the transition to formal schooling is a major challenge for these children in particular (INTO, 1995). These interventions recognise the importance of ECCE experiences and that early disadvantage will effect children's ongoing experiences in formal schooling.

One of the aims of this study is to identify any particular groups, or type of child, which preschool practitioners and teachers of Junior Infants classes in Ireland believe are a greater risk during the period of transition.

### 4.2.5 Socio-Emotional Wellbeing During the Period of Transition

Connections between socio-emotional wellbeing and learning have long been recognised (Brostrom 2000; Fabian 2002; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002a; Griebel & Niesel, 2003; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Haas-Foletta and Ottolini-Geno, 2006). Laevers, Vandenbussche, Kog & Depondt (1997) describe children who are emotionally secure as being like "*fish in water*" (p.15) in new educational settings, this then enables them to maximise their academic potential. Such children appear to be emotionally well-equipped to approach new educational settings with confidence, demonstrating independence in the face of new situations.

However, Dunlop and Fabian (2002) report that children they have studied in the course of their research often experience a loss of confidence during the first weeks of school. They stress that children are often undermined by the process of change, and it is necessary to equip them with the tools they need to read new situations and "*be agents in their own transitions*" (p148). They propose that the stresses involved in starting school, such as coping with the playground, are decreased with better social understanding, and that teachers and parents are well placed to empower children with the social skills needed to cope with the transition. The preschool years in particular are cited as being of particular importance for children to develop the social competence which will enable them to meet the cognitive challenges they will face on entry to school.

Brostrom (2000) suggests that children cope better emotionally with the transition to formal schooling when making the transition with peers that they view as friends. He suggests that teachers should create secure environments for children by ensuring that existing friendships are encouraged. Bronfenbrenner (1979) also suggested that the developmental potential of a new setting is increased if the child enters the setting with support from an already familiar setting. This would suggest that starting school with a friend from preschool would aid the transition process. Research shows that many children better handle challenges "*when they can hold a friend's hand, both literally and figuratively*" (Brostrom, 2000, p8). These findings are supported by international research (Elliot, 1998; Fabian, 1998; 2000; Margetts, 1999; Griebel & Niesel, 1999; Peters, 2000). Griebel & Niesel (1999) found that both parents and children felt more comfortable if they knew at least one friend from preschool would be starting school with their child. They found that some parents made an active attempt to ensure that this would take place. This could be considered an attempt to ensure some continuity during a period of change.

Research has suggested that the first teacher that children encounter in their school career plays a role in helping the child to develop their self-esteem, confidence, self-worth, and social skills (Fabian, 2002; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002a). It has also been noted that most teachers at this level are very aware of the importance of this year in terms of life long learning, and value their role in promoting children's perceptions of themselves as successful learners (Wolery, 1999; Fay & Griffin, 2004). Some information is available on Irish primary school teacher's beliefs about the importance of self-esteem in the classroom. Hayes et al (1997) questioned Irish primary school teachers on what they considered to be the most important skills for children ages 3-5 to learn. Only 22% of primary school teachers considered skills of 'self-assessment' as being in their top three most important areas. 'Self-assessment' included "*to feel good about him/herself. To be aware of his/her own emotions and to feel comfortable expressing them appropriately*" (p55). These findings were supported by results from another aspect of the study, observing how adults spent their time in their settings. Results on how much time adults spent in 'nurturance / expression of affect' type behaviour found that in schools adults only spent 2% of their time in this way. These findings suggest that socio-emotional wellbeing may not be top of the priorities of

primary school teachers. Daly (2002) questioned preschool providers and infants classes teachers about the areas of social, emotional, moral and spiritual development, and found a lack of emphasis on emotional development, particularly at primary level. She found that although the teachers had a theoretical awareness of the importance of such areas, they were not prioritised in the classroom at a practical level. So, although both preschool and primary school teachers acknowledged emotional development as being of importance, both groups, but particularly the primary school respondents acknowledged that they did not spend a great deal of their time focusing on such development.

### 4.2.6. How Do We Define A Successful Transition to School?

Dockett & Perry (2004) highlight the fact that although there is a general consensus on the importance of a successful transition to formal schooling, there is little agreement on how exactly we define such a transition. They note that this may in part be due to the ecological model of transition, in that each child's transition must be viewed within that individual context. Their study found differences in parent's and teacher's judgements on the factors that decided that a child has had a successful first two terms at school. Parents rated academic items as more important than teachers. Teachers however tended to focus more on dispositions towards school, and whether the child could follow school routines as being of importance, which was identified as being consistent with previous findings in this area. Preschool teachers also rated dispositions highly, but not so much adjustment to school items. It was noted that these differences in opinion on what constitutes a successful transition could well cause conflict in expectations at a time when the three groups should be working together for the good of the child.

## 4.3 The Child During Transition: Policies and Practices

Policies and Practices in place in Irish preschools and schools with regard to transition are detailed in Chapter 3. This section reviews some of the literature concerning international research into policies and practices which affect the child during this time of change.

### 4.3.1 The Issue of School Readiness

Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman & Cox (1999) advise that no discussion on the transition to formal schooling would be complete without mentioning the concept of readiness. Indeed policies and practices relating to readiness impact strongly on the child during this period of transition. Graue (1992) advises that readiness is the "*quintessential early childhood construct, part science, part theory, part myth, part perception, and part passion*" (p110). The issue of school readiness has been investigated from many perspectives (Davies & North, 1990; Grau, 1992, 1993; Lewit & Baker, 1995; Pianta & McCoy, 1997) however, it must be noted that what is meant by readiness depends on who is doing the defining (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). La Paro & Pianta (2000) advise that the term is a particularly value-laden one and in practical terms often refers to children's skills and characteristics. Meisels (1999) advises that the issues of readiness became prominent in the United States following the establishment of the six National Education Goals. The first of these, Goal 1, states 'All children in America will start school ready to learn'. Although as Kagan (2003) points out, children begin learning long before school entry, and Goal 1 actually refers to the construct of *school* readiness. Meisels (1999) advises that since the late 1980's this goal has been the subject of numerous meetings, conferences, studies and policies, and has ensured that the issue of whether America's children were ready to start formal schooling has remained prominent in the minds of policy makers and researchers alike.

The issue of how to define whether a child is ready for formal schooling is a contentious one. Because of the various opinions on what readiness involved, the United States National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP) worked for a two year period on a definition of readiness. They suggested that it was a five pronged construct, encompassing the dimensions of physical and motor development; social and emotional development; language and communication; approach to learning; and general knowledge. They also included in their definition of readiness the notions that schools need to be ready for students, and that community involvement is important to consider. They also noted cultural context as being of importance in any discussion of readiness (Kagan, 2003). However, Meisels cites a growing concern,

following Goal 1, about the use of standardised tests to assess children's school readiness. He also suggests that the effort to ensure that every child started school ready to learn resulted in an increased focus on academic pursuits in kindergarten. During this period, groups such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1988, 1990) and the National Commission on Children (1992) criticised the emphasis on academic outcomes at the expense of play based learning for younger children. The fear was that the policies and practices being developed to reach Goal 1 were actually damaging to young children. Meisels (1999) advises that "*the readiness issue is thick with dilemmas*" (p59) and he pointed out that children are actually born ready to learn they do not have to wait until preschool age, or the transition to primary school, to become ready. He also suggests that the concept of readiness implies that children have access to equal opportunities before attending formal schooling. However in reality that is not the case. Bruner (1966) suggested that school readiness is a "*mischievous half-truth…largely because it turns out that one teaches readiness or provides opportunities for its nurture, one does not simply wait for it*" (p29).

La Paro & Pianta (2000) conducted a meta-analytic review of predictions of children's competence, both in academic/cognitive and social/behavioural measures, in the early school years. They concluded that although school readiness tests provided reasonable estimates of some skills (particularly in the academic/cognitive domain) they were actually relatively poor predictors of social development and behaviour in school. They noted that these findings raised issues in relation to the definition of school readiness, and indeed with the assessment of readiness. Their findings would support the notion that readiness need to be assessed in terms other than children's skills and abilities. They did acknowledge several limitations of their review, including the fact that broad definitions of performance were used, and that the study did not focus on ecological or interactive aspects of transitions – for example they did not examine predictions for classroom, family or community factors. However, they did conclude that there is a general agreement on the importance of social and behaviour skills in terms of indicators of competence. Acknowledging this belief, they argued that it is important that readiness assessments need to better predict social/behavioural outcomes if they are to be considered effective, even allowing for the difficulties in prediction. Their findings also

supported the need for schools to be more ready for children with their individual needs and development.

In their review of two decades of research on school readiness, Crnic and Lamberty (1994) suggest that the idea that we have an understanding of the skills required for school success is a 'false notion'. They advise "*we currently have no theory or credible empirical base from which to judge what the most critical skills for readiness may be*." (p96). They suggest that assessing children's preacademic, cognitive, and linguistic performance was of limited assistance in deciding whether a child would have a smooth transition to school, and was only one aspect of the wide ranging spectrum of readiness issues. Dunlop (2004) would agree, and advises that readiness is predicated on the idea that the child and family must adapt to school life, rather than the school adapting to the child. Yeboah (2002) also proposes a more interactionist perspective, suggesting that readiness for school occurs when children are able to participate fully in school life. He suggests that this is a result of both the child having the necessary skills to prepare them for school, and also a result of the policies and practical activities in place to help the child to make the transition. In this view readiness is "*a bidirectional concept*" (Meisels, 1999, p49). Rather than seeing readiness in terms of maturation, as in the nativist perspective, or in terms of the characteristics of the child's behaviours as in the empiricist perspective, or seeing readiness in social and cultural terms, as in the social constructivist perspective, the interactionist perspective sees readiness in a comprehensive way. So readiness involves both children's abilities and skills, and the environments in which they grow and learn. As Ackerman & Barnett (2005) remind us, the issue of whether a child is ready for school is dependent on the demands that the school places in the child in combination with the support it provides. In this way readiness is a relative term, it is a product of the interaction of the dynamics of the child, the environment in which they have experienced their learning, and cultural influences (Meisels, 1995). This would tie in with the ecological perspective on the transition to school, in that the child's transition and their readiness for that transition, is considered in terms of the various environments in which the child is developing, and the relationships between these environments.

Allowing for the differing views on the issue of readiness, it is however, clear that children who are not considered to be ready for formal schooling are entering this transition at a disadvantage. This may in fact be a fulfilment of teacher expectations. A child who is not deemed ready in the eyes of their teachers is less likely be capable of meeting teacher expectations (Brostrom, 2002). He outlines the belief of many Danish primary school teachers that many of the children starting in the first year of formal schooling lack the skills and competencies that are needed in this new situation. They argue that preschools are not adequately preparing children for the different class situation of formal education. Brostrom suggests that preschool and primary school teachers may have different definitions of what school readiness actually means. Indeed, other research studies have reported different beliefs and expectations between preschool and primary school teachers (Hayes et al, 1997; Perry et al, 2000; Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Zill (1999) found a disparity between the skills teachers consider important in formal schooling, and the feedback that they give parents on children's behaviour. Items such as the ability to sit still and pay attention were considered to be very important by less than half the teachers questioned, however one in seven parents reported teachers complaining to them that their children fidgets all the time and could not sit still. Related to this one in four parents was told that their child did not pay attention for long enough. Zill reported it 'disquieting' that such a disparity was found, and suggested that the area of behavioural control needs to be further investigated. This lack of agreement is certainly an important issue surrounding the readiness debate, and one of the aims of this study is to identify the skills that Irish preschool and primary school teachers identify as being important in this regard.

### 4.3.2 Links Between School Readiness and Age

The area of school readiness is also linked to the issue of the age the child starts school. Historically, age has been the main criterion for school entry. As discussed in Chapter 3, many children in Ireland start school at a young age, four or five years old. The compulsory school age is six, however the majority of children start school in the September after their fourth birthday. Most will have had some part-time playgroup experience prior to that. INTO (2006) note that although children are entitled to start school at four years old, some parents prefer to wait until the child is five, while in

some schools due to pressure for places only the older children applying for places in a given year will get a place, resulting in an older intake of pupils. This leads to a situation where children starting school each September in Ireland range from just four years old, to over five and a half years old. Peter Moss (2001) tells us that "*the European norm has been settling at three years or more of publicly-funded nursery schooling or kindergarten prior to compulsory school at age six*". In Ireland, attendance at early education services is dependent on parent's ability to pay fees, or on the availability of scarce services. The issue of whether school is the most appropriate place for four-year-olds has been debated for some time (Cleave & Brown, 1991; Dowling, 1995; Hayes et al, 1997; Oberhuemer & Ulich, 1997; Atkinson, 2000; McInnes, 2002; Hayes, 2004a). Horgan advises:

> *Starting school is a critical period in the development of all children since it makes a range of potentially stressful demands on them – some emotional, physical and social and others intellectual and linguistic in nature. There is a growing consensus of opinion which argues that four is too young to begin this traumatic 'rite of passage'.* (1995, p255).

She also advises that research suggests Junior Infants teachers label children as early as the first term. Often then children are grouped into levels of achievement at that early stage. This has major implications for the youngest children in the class. She argues that these children are at greatest risk in junior infant classes "*experiencing the greatest adjustment and learning difficulties which frequently result in unfair, premature labelling*" (p256).

Prais (1997) examining why summer born children in the United Kingdom widely achieve lower academic standards than their older class counterparts, has suggested that greater flexibility is needed on the age of starting school. He compared the UK calendar based enrolment policies, with the Swiss practice of advocating more flexibility on age, while allowing for differences in ability. He found the later practice results in a more mixed-age grouping but fewer differences in terms of ability. Prais suggested that this situation is more efficient in terms of both teaching and learning. Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson (2000) refer to a similar practice in Hungary, whereby children are not registered by their calendar age of six years, but according to their stage of development. This practice results in 20-30% of children

staying at kindergarten for an extra year before commencing school, which they suggest, reduces large variations in ability, and early failure for some children.

McInnes (2002) reported on a study of 23 four-year-olds in the United Kingdom and their experience of education in either preschool or formal schooling. The study used non-participant observation and interviews with children, teachers and parents, to assess the educational experiences of the children. They found that the children in preschools achieved higher levels of involvement and learning than those in formal schooling. Overall the preschool environments demonstrated higher levels of appropriate practice with young children across all variables. Children in reception class in primary school engaged in more whole-class, adult-initiated activities, achieved lower involvement scores and lower well-being scores, than the other children. She suggested that the children in preschools were receiving a curriculum and practice that was more suited to their needs than those in formal schooling. These findings support previous research in this area. Pugh (1996, 2001) has questioned whether primary classes in the United Kingdom with ratios as high as 1:30, where many teachers are not trained to work with four and five year olds, and where the curriculum is unlikely to be appropriate for this age group, is the appropriate place for four year olds. She advises that the evidence suggests that there are no educational advantages to entering school at this early age, in the contrary, the evidence suggests that introducing these young children to an inappropriately formal curriculum has adverse effects. Similar fears have been expressed about four year olds in Irish primary school classes (Horgan, 1995; Hayes et al 1997; Hayes, 2004a).

### 4.3.3 Accepting Children at their own Developmental Level

Despite the variety of experiences children bring with them they need to be accepted at their own developmental level. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28 and 29) advised that regardless of their developmental status, children should be automatically given the right to an education. So, not only must the child have skills to cope with the demands of the first years of primary education, schools should also be prepared to be 'child ready' (Brostrom, 2000, 2002; Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2006) The aim is for each child to capitalise on the knowledge they bring with them. Brostrom stresses that this relates not only to the physical environment, but also the

emotional environment of the school, which should promote a feeling of "*belonging, well-bring, and capacity to succeed*" (2000, p2). Brostrom (2002) suggests that both preschools and schools have an important role to play in the area of school and child readiness. He proposes that preschools should develop both curricula and practices which have their own value at a preschool level, but also which assist the child in reaching the developmental levels expected at school. Schools, he suggests, have the responsibility to meet each child at the developmental level they have attained. Indeed, Katz (1992) has also argued that schools need to be more "*responsive to the wide range of developmental levels, backgrounds, experiences, and needs that children being to school with them*" (1992, p16). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) also support this view. They have difficulty with the concept that the long-term effect of ECCE is the main concern of the early childhood institution. They suggest this view ignores the fact that the early childhood phase of learning is just one part of a continuous lifelong learning process, no less valid in its own right than any other phase. They propose that:

> *"Rather than making the child ready for school, it seems to use that the issue is whether the school is prepared for the child who has been in the questioning and co-constructive milieu of the early childhood institution"* (1999, p83)

### 4.3.4 Three Approaches to Difficulties during the Period of Transition

Keeping the above views on ready children and ready schools in mind, Myers (1997) proposed that difficulties with transition can be approached from three different viewpoints. These are: the problem lies with the child or the preschool environment; the problems lies with the school environment; the problem lies in the disjunction between preschool and primary school. Depending on which perspective is taken the problems are addressed in different ways and different strategies for addressing the problems are employed.

Myers (1997) suggests that the first approach is very common, and results in intervention aimed at changing the child or the preschool or both. He cites many early childhood intervention programmes which are aimed at both the child and the family, and suggests that a successful transition to school is one of the aims of these programmes. However, if the problem is seen to be a deficiency in the child or family

environment there is a danger of placing blame for failure with the family. This can create a vicious circle where an aura of failure within the family propagates a fear of failure in the expectations of the child, increasing the likelihood of actual failure. Graue (1992) would support this assertion, and is also critical of these deficit model systems which blame children for not reaching school expectations.

Myers (1997) also suggests that approaches that to try to change the child take a negative approach, attempting to identify the deficits in the children or their families, and then focusing on how to 'fix' these problems. Instead of focusing on 'negatives' he proposes that it is more useful to identify the strengths of the children. Carr (2000, 2001) also supports the notion of replacing a deficit approach with one which accentuates the positives. She proposes the notion of developing 'learning stories' to explore and extend children's learning with a focus on what can be achieved, and the progression during children's intellectual growth. These can be used to identify children's strengths and assets.

It is also worth noting that placing an emphasis on school and the future can in fact take from preschoolers the right to enjoy these preschool years. They should be considered important in their own right, rather than considered as being a time to work towards the next stage of life. Finally it should be noted that although some of the above interventions are very successful, these well prepared students then sometimes make the transition to schools which are not prepared for them, which leads us to the second scenario.

The second approach is to change the school. In this instance, the problem is identified as being within the primary school. Myers suggests that many efforts made within schools to facilitate transition do not actually change the school environment to suit the child, but again attempt to change the child to suit the school. He cites readiness programmes and tutorials, or additional teaching, as examples. Readiness programmes in particular he suggests, although they can be responsible for short-term gains, are not a solution in the long-term. He suggests that successful transition programmes should take place for at least the first two years of schooling. Other methods intended to change the school environment could also be more successful. Some of these are related to the organisation of the school system, for example

reducing class sizes, individual entry systems, and locating preschools within primary schools. With regard to reducing class sizes, Myers (1997) advises that in large classes, the main concern of the teacher must be class management rather than education. The issues of group size and adult:child ratio are two related features that have been the subject of much research in ECCE. Findings suggest that that both influence both programme quality and children's learning and development (Howes, Phillips and Whitebrook,1992; Howes, 1997; National Research Council, 2001; Clark-Stewart et al, 2002). It is suggested that these two aspects are associated with higher scores on global measures of quality and more extensive teacher-child interaction (National Research Council, 2001).

The third approach is supporting smooth transitions through building links between home, preschool and school. This perspective views education as a shared experience. Myers suggests that inherent in this approach is respect for the positive aspects of each environment, and to foster communication between groups. He suggests that adults should work to develop coping skills in children that will enable them to face new challenges, rather than to 'remould' them to suit a new environment. He also states that this third approach, instead of changing the nature of the child, or the nature of the school, should focus on anticipating challenges, addressing expectations, building co-operation, and improving communication. Providing continuity, of curriculum and teaching approach, he suggests, is also important. This means reducing discontinuities between the two settings. Ensuring that the curricula of both preschools and schools are developed in ways that are developmentally appropriate is all important in this context. Flexibility should also be introduced into all curricula to ensure that they facilitate the progression of children from the preschool to school environment.

In conclusion, Myers noted that efforts to ease children's transitions from preschool to school should combine solutions from all three of these approaches. He proposes transition plans as a process for bringing together a number of strategies to facilitate the smooth transition from preschool to school.

### 4.4 The Family During Transition: Attitudes and Beliefs

The family is considered to be the most important microsystem for the child. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that links between microsystems can help to ease stress for the child when moving from one to another. Involving parents in the process of transition has been identified as an area of importance by many researchers (Margetts, 2002; Neuman, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2004).

#### 4.4.1 Parents Beliefs about School Readiness

There has been much research both internationally (Tudge, Hogan, Lee, Tammeveski, Meltsas, Kulakova, Snezhkova & Putnam, 1999; Campbell, Pungello, Miller-Johnson, Burchinal and Ramey, 2001) and in Ireland (Hayes et al, 1997) on the beliefs of parents with regard to education, and the impact of parental beliefs and expectations. Hayes (2004a) has suggested that "*these beliefs and their match to teachers become an important factor of influence in early educational practice*" (p53). With regard to school readiness, research studies have found that many parents express the belief that children benefit from starting school later (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Brostrom 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 2002). Margetts (1999) found that parents rated older children as being more academically competent than younger children. The implication being that relative age is associated with adjustment to school as a measure of academic competence. Indeed, Watson (1996) advises that many teachers hold classic maturationist views. Watson noted however, that research suggests that children held back do not benefit academically, and do not out-perform their peers at first grade level.

Research had suggested that teachers cite parents as being a source of pressure in terms of promoting an academic curriculum (Stipek & Byler 1997; INTO, 1995). Hayes et al (1997) reported that parents with four-year-olds in preschool ranked social skills with peers as being most important for their children to develop, while parents with four-year-olds in primary school ranked pre-academic skills as being most important. A compilation of research findings on parent and teacher beliefs about school readiness in the United States (Lewit & Baker, 1995) found that while parents and teachers were in basic agreement about the skills necessary to start school, parents

were more likely to consider academic skills as being important. This may highlight a need to challenge parental expectations of what four and five year olds should be doing in school.

### 4.4.2 Continuity for Parents during the Period of Transition

Bailey et al (1996) advise that transition from preschool to formal schooling is a normative critical event for families, however although it is considered normative it is associated with uncertainty and stress. The preschool may have been a familiar place for the parents, who may well have developed relationships with teaching staff. They may also be anxious about their child's transfer into formal schooling. Involving them in the transition process should renew their sense of involvement in their child's education. Johansson (2002) suggests that how the parents view the process of transition is highly influential on how the child adjusts to the new situation.

Griebel & Niesel (1999) identify entry into primary school as a very important life event that needs to be considered a family transition, one for both child and parents. The parents in their study reported that the first day of school was for them a time of "*strong emotional arousal*" (p.8) and identified this as a time when their child was leaving the trouble free world of childhood and was entering a more serious phase of life. School entry also changed the daily routine for parents, and homework in particular was noted as an influence of school over family, mothers in particular. Griebel & Niesel noted that this was an area where suddenly the child was confronted with criticism, a new experience for a child who was used to praise for work undertaken in kindergarten. Suddenly achievement, and academic skills, took on an importance in the parents life. Generally, they found that family atmospheres became stricter after school entry, with punctuality and routine becoming important features of family life.

### 4.4.3 Communication with Parents during Transition

Research has found that parents want information during transitions (Fabian, 1998; 2000; McIntyre, Ekert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007). A study conducted in the UK (Fabian, 2000) involved interviewing the parents of 50 children starting their

first year of schooling, to gain an insight into their experiences. She found that although parents sought information on the school and its systems, at times the information presented was insufficient, given in a way which was confusing, or misleading. Information had to be accessible in both quality and quantity in order to be of use to parents and reduce stress. Griebel and Niesel (1999) found that parents particularly sought information with regard to school readiness from preschool staff. However they found information was transferred less readily between school teachers and parents, with parents criticising a lack of information about what and how the child was doing.

Dunlop (2002) researched the opportunities for parents to share their views of their children as learners with both preschool and primary school staff in Scotland. She found that parent-teacher interactions were much more common at preschool level, with parents reporting a confidence that practitioners knew their children well. At school level however, parents reported that although they were sympathetic to the task undertaken by teachers, they found few opportunities to meet and talk about their children's progress. Indeed, other research has suggested that parents find preschool teachers easier to build a relationship with than primary school teachers. Henry (2007) reported that parents found preschool teachers to be particularly non-judgemental as compared to other professional groups. This supports the findings of Griebel & Niesel (2002) who studied the behaviour of parents whose first born was starting school, before and after transition. They found that prior to school entry parents sought reassurance from the preschool teacher that their child was ready for formal schooling, and used her as a source of information on the abilities of the child. However the study found that information on school life was found by contact with parents of children already in school, rather than direct contact with the school itself. They suggested that parents and educators need to enter greater dialogue about the process of transition to formal schooling and methods for smoothing this transition for both children and parents.

It is important to note however, that communication between parents and teachers can be seen as a one way street, with the information being transferred from teacher to parent. Parents also have valuable information about their child which could be of great use to teacher. Smolkin (1999) advises that parents have an understanding of

their child's strengths and weaknesses which should be important to teachers not only from an academic viewpoint, but also for the provision of emotional support. Myers (1997) advises that this implies that all parents are able to assess and discuss their child's abilities, which might not always be the case. In these circumstances it is important that parents are encouraged to articulate the beliefs about their child's strengths and needs.

### 4.4.4 The Role of the 'School Parent'

Peters has suggested that teachers have images of parents and the role they should play during their child's transition to school. They use these images as norms against which they judge new parents (Peters, 2007). Research has highlighted the need for a supportive home environment particularly in terms of adequate nurturing and nutrition, in order for children to learn (McCain & Mustard, 1999) and teachers are clearly aware of these needs. However, it is not clear that teachers have a good understanding of their students' home lives. They can at times make assumptions based on the impressions that they receive in their classrooms. Research findings would support the notion that teachers are often unaware of parents' home assistance to children in their learning (Siraj-Blatchford & Brooker, 1998; Brooker 2002). As Brooker (2002) suggests some forms of cultural capital can get "*stuck in the boundary between home and school*" (p119) and go un-noticed by teachers. Indeed, Brooker found that children who attended school on a regular basis were found to come from families who were well-organized and supportive of their children's education. The children's attendance records in Brooker's study correlated with their achievement in the first year of formal education. She also noted that often when staff in her study viewed parents negatively it was because their children were persistently late, or missing from school. How the parent had adapted to the role of school parent, and their beliefs about what that role entailed, and the expectations that the school had of that role, had a clear impact on how the children were viewed.

To facilitate the parent in adapting to the role of school parent, a partnership approach between parent and school is necessary. In order that the parent understands what is expected of them in this role the school must be clear on its policies and practices. The responsibility is with the school to ensure that parents clearly understand these

policies, and they should work towards a balance in power relations between school and parent. Brooker (2005) reminds us of the importance of "*a serious and respectful listening, and not…a home school dialogue that assumes that the school is always right*" (p128). She suggests that educators should always start from the position that parents wish their children to succeed in school, and try to focus on this shared home-school concern for learning, while schools work towards developing more successful dialogue with parents who they consider to be hard to reach.

## 4.5 The Family During Transition: Policies and Practices

This section reviews some of the literature concerning international research into policies and practices involving parents during the transition of their children to school.

### 4.5.1 Policies and Practices with Regard to Communication

Margetts (2002) suggests some ways to include parents in the transition process as follows: providing parents with verbal and written information on the school; opportunities for parents to become familiar with staff; identifying skills and behaviours related to successful school adjustment; suggesting activities to prepare children for school; and giving parents information about the procedures for the first day at school and what is expected of them and their child. However, Early & Pianta (1998) found that contact between family and school was one of the least used practices during transition to kindergarten. Less than 15% of the teachers they surveyed had actively engaged in family-school contact related to this transition.

It is important that staff make time to engage in discussion with parents about their child's development and learning. Such contact should be an opportunity for staff and parents to talk through their different perspectives and resolve any differences (Kagan & Neuman, 1997). Such meetings can be formal, or can occur more frequently and informally as parents drop off or collect children. Myers (1997) advises, however, that not all teachers have good communication skills. Their training focuses on communication with children, not with adults and he proposes that training in this area should be included in their initial teacher training. Even staff with good

communication skills may face challenges in contacting all parents. Neuman (2002) notes "*barriers seem to particularly affect parents with modest educational levels or low socioeconomic backgrounds, those who are among the least empowered groups in society"* (p20).

Fabian (2002a) suggests that in practical terms, although schools often hold their initial meetings with parents in large groups, small cohorts would instead create a welcoming atmosphere where parents were more likely to be treated as individuals. In this way, informal partnerships could be built up more easily. She also suggests that initial contacts should be used for two-way flow of information, and that opportunities should be created for parents to share their knowledge of their children with schools. Whalley and the Pen Green Team (2001) encourage ECCE staff to have high expectations of parents. They warn that judgements made by staff of parents can impact negatively on how the family feel about school and, possibly, create barriers to involvement. Their policies in communicating with parents involve explaining decisions and policies, being scrupulously fair, and remaining aware of the rights of parents at all times. They recommend involvement of parents in decision making processes, and listening to their views. Whalley suggests that teaching staff "*may need to develop very different strategies to engage parents who have had poor experiences of education and schooling*" (p116). She does report however that most parents want more information on their children, how they learn, and how they can help their children.

#### 4.5.2 The Need for Inclusive Policies and Practices

Brooker (2002) has also identified that a mis-match in cultural or linguistic terms between the home environment and the school environment can result in a difficult adaptation to school for children. She highlighted the ways in which children from Bangladeshi families were marginalised by their differences from the rest of the children, and the staff, of an inner-city London school. Difficulties in communication, beliefs about education, and expectations between Bangladeshi parents and school staff caused further difficulties for the children. Although the school she worked with considered its practices to be inclusive, she suggested that this was very much based on a Western idea of educational practices. With this in mind, she suggested that

schools need to carefully consider their school ethos in terms of inclusivity. When reflecting on pedagogy she suggested greater reflection on Vygotsky's theory of instruction, and stressed the need for adults to support individual children's learning within their own zone of proximal development in a culturally inclusive context. This would be supported by Stephen & Cope's (2003) suggestion that inclusivity needs to be viewed via a social model, suggesting that the school should aim to identify any institutional barriers that might make transition to school more difficult for some children and their families. Teachers need to be proactive in working with individual children to support them during transition, rather than seeing a problem as being the responsibility of the child, their parents, or family group.

The importance of inclusivity has been highlighted for many years in Ireland with reference to traveller children (DES, 2003; 2005d; 2005e). The Preschools for Travellers National Evaluation Report (DES, 2003) has recommended that all preschools should actively work on policies and procedures to encourage equality. Meaningful partnerships with Traveller parents, which work towards ensuring the child's cultural background is reflected in educational decision making have been called for (Boyle, 2007; Boyle, forthcoming). Boyle argues "*structures for parental involvement must address the issue of equality and must involve a dialogue rooted in respect for difference*" (2007, p1). She acknowledges that there is much to be done in this regard, and advises that although mothers in her study visit schools for many reasons "*it is never as partners*" (2007, p7).

The need for inclusive policies and practices has also been highlighted with reference to parents from disadvantaged areas (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; DES, 2005f) and ethnic minority groups (Vincent & Martin, 2005). With regard to ethnic minorities in Ireland, the need for inclusive policies and practices can be expected to be highlighted once again in terms of the rights of migrant children. Since the 1990's Ireland has experienced increased cultural diversity. Children from such communities may have additional needs as regards the transition to school. Brooker (2005) advises "*none of us will underestimate the difficulties facing teachers with large groups, too little help, and too many children speaking an unknown language. The only fruitful way forward in such situations, we might conclude, is to put all our efforts into supporting children's personal and social development, engaging with children in ways which*

*include them in classroom culture*" (p.128). Indeed the OECD (2004a) has identified cultural and racial diversity as being a challenge to ECCE providers and practitioners in Ireland. This is an issue which can be expected to become even more prominent in terms of transition to school for children in Ireland in the future.

### 4.5.3 Transitions Capital

The concept of social capital encompasses the actual or virtual resources accrued to an individual or social group through their social network, and it can be used to explain how that particular group is placed in terms of moderating or increasing the likelihood of risk (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997). Piotrkowski (2001) considers a child's personal readiness resources (social capital) as: their health and age-appropriate independence, ability to regulate emotion and behaviour, good social interaction and communication skills, an interest in learning, motor skills, cognitive ability, and the ability to meet classroom demands. Social capital is based on the premise that social networks have value, and that some networks are valued more than others. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified, neighbourhoods are an important context influencing children's development. Indicators of social capital have been associated with positive educational outcomes as has a lack of social capital been associated with negative outcomes (Colman, 1988, 1990; Teachman, Paasch & Carver, 1996; Portes, 1998; Runyan et al, 1998) although it can be difficult to determine the exact cause and effect of such associations (Kelleghan, 2001). As stated, not all forms of social capital are positive, certain risk factors have been identified at neighbourhood level, such as low socio-economic status, family composition (proportion of single-parent families), and a lack of community supports, which can have a considerable impact on child and family outcomes (CECDE, 2006a). As Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid (1998) advise, the extent to which children take in educational information is linked to their prior knowledge and experience of learning:

> *Children take with them to school their health and ill-health and their contrastive accumulations of privileges and disadvantages (economic, cultural, social, symbolic and linguistic capital).* (p157).

Lareau (1987; 2000) identified the role that social class and social capital play in terms of parental ability to conform to the expectations of schools. She identified that schools have standardised views on the role that school parents should play, and that aspects of social capital effect parent's abilities to comply with teacher requests, thus indirectly impacting on children's school experiences.

Brooker (2002) has further developed this concept to discuss the impact of the cultural capital that children posses on arrival at school, and has drawn attention to the way in which social and cultural expectations shape children's interactions within educational institutions. She found that the cultural capital which some children bring to the school environment "*may not transpose into the official education system*" (Brooker, 2003, p127). She found a continuum of beliefs and practices undertaken by families, some of which did not translate easily into the school ethos, resulting in difficulties for children in accessing the pedagogy of the primary school. Walsh (2001) suggests that without such capital "*there is no starting point from which to begin formal education and school rejection becomes imminent*" (p.10). He suggests that educational disadvantage plays an important part in this respect, and highlights that it is not necessarily confined to disadvantaged schools, but can also be found in middle-class schools. Brooker proposes that the responsibility lies with schools to make explicit to parents both the formal and informal practices which shape their pedagogy and curriculum. Then, she believes, all families "*might have easier access to the cultural goods that most teachers are striving to offer*" (2003, p127).

Dunlop (2007, 2007a) has further developed the concept of capital at the time of transitions, and it's impact on the child and their family suggesting that a new model emerging in the field of transitions is the notion of 'Transitions Capital'. This concept being developed in the belief that a greater understanding and reflection on the concept of transition developed through the participation of all the stakeholders, will result in transitions themselves being transformed. Dunlop reminds us of the importance of transitions, particularly the initial transition to school, to the lives of the children undertaking the transition, along with their parents, and their educators. She argues that how each individual child experiences this transition can transform them either positively or negatively. Because of the experiences of the children for whom

transition is a negative experience, the very experience of transition itself needs to be transformed. Research on transitions and the concept of transitions capital may be a useful tool with which to work towards such transformation on behalf of these children. As Dunlop herself advises:

> *"This new notion of 'transitions capital' as an essential part of influencing the field, the expectation of creating a field of enquiry that embraces many transitions that affect our lives, and the possibility of transitions being both transformed and a tool for transforming policy, research and practice, is an exciting one." (2007, p165)*

### 4.6 The Professional During Transition: Attitudes and Beliefs

While the process of transition involves children, their parents, preschool practitioners and primary school teachers, it is in fact the two groups of teachers who have the power in the classroom (Peters, 2002). It is they who ultimately have the responsibility for implementing, or not, recommendations relating to making transitions successful for children. However, following an ecological perspective, the role of the practitioner or teacher should not be viewed in isolation. Just as Bronfenbrenner suggests that the child is influenced by five environmental systems, so too is the teacher. The microsystem of the school, it's ethos and the views of colleagues within the school, followed by the links between the teacher, school, and parents, will also influence the teacher herself. Beliefs the teacher may have about preschool education, and her understanding of the preschool system can also impact on the transition for children in her care. The exosystem and macrosystem also influence the teacher, in terms of the curriculum she has to work with, and the cultural expectations and views of teaching staff and their roles in society. This section examines the literature relating to attitudes and beliefs about professional involvement, both at preschool and primary school level, in the process of transition.

#### 4.6.1 Professional Communication and Continuity During the Period of Transition

Research has shown that poor communication between ECCE programmes and schools is a barrier to successful transition for children (Pianta & Walsh 1996; Kagan

& Neuman, 1999; Christenson, 1999, Margetts, 1999). It is suggested that ongoing communication between these groups, and parents, would help ensure that schools were building on what children have learnt in pre-schools and in their life experiences. Dunlop (2003) found in her study of different perspectives on the transition process that there was a wide discrepancy between the views of preschool practitioners and school teachers on the capabilities of the same children. She found that information about children did not reach the receiving teachers in time to be useful, and identified a lack of understanding of each others sector, in some cases this extended to the curriculum of the other group. She concluded that the views of preschool practitioners and school teachers on children as learners differed greatly, and that a "*disparity of views amongst educators are unlikely to be in children's best interests*" (p108). She suggested that the two groups need to develop a greater understanding of each others ideologies and find ways to share policies. This, she suggests, will enable the children undertaking transitions to understand better the curriculum, the relationships, and the settings in which they are expected to learn.

Fabian (2002) reported similar findings in the United Kingdom. She advised that often preschool practitioners are vague about school procedures, and very often the schools' knowledge of preschool life is equally vague. She suggests that better communication is needed for both groups to develop an understanding of each others philosophy and procedures. One preschool leader in her study reported:

> *We talk about going to school but I can't really tell them much because I don't know. They pick things up and we look at books about starting school…We hope the things we do, like cutting and construction, are preparing them for school. I'd like school to come and see what we're doing here.*
>
> (Fabian, 2002, p64).

Better communication between the two groups would enable them to have a better understanding of children's cultural backgrounds. Knowledge of such details would be a useful framework for teachers when considering children's performance in school. Hill et al (1998) reported in a study of 100 children undergoing transition to school that, without exception, pre-school practitioners and parents had much greater knowledge of children both academically and emotionally than teachers at school. Therefore, they suggested that forms of mediation between home, pre-school and school were crucial, however in practice they found little transfer of this information

to school teachers. Timperley, McNaughton, Howie, Robinson (2003) found that although preschool practitioners and primary school teachers described their commitment to collaboration during the period of transition, in practice they had very different expectations of each other. They found that schools proposed that preschools should teach children how to behave in school-appropriate ways by familiarising them with appropriate routines and expected behaviours. Preschools felt that they should prepare children by teaching developmentally appropriate numeracy and literacy skills, and that schools should offer children opportunities to learn appropriate routines and expected behaviours through pre-enrolment visits. These differences in expectations may well lead to a more difficult transition for children, and remind us of the importance of communication between the two groups of teachers.

Neuman (2000) however suggests that barriers to such communication are complex and involve more than the often cited time constraints. She reports on an OECD project aiming to improve links between ECCE and Primary Schools. This project identified various barriers to ensuring smooth transitions. Firstly, philosophical differences between the two settings were an issue, with schools and preschools having different visions and cultures, and a lack of shared goals. Staff attended different training programmes and worked with different pedagogical approaches and methods. Neuman (2002) suggested that staff in both settings perceive greater links between preschools and schools as a threat to their individual approaches. She proposed that cultural differences are reinforced by structural differences, in that preschool and primary services usually fall under different administrative auspices, adhere to different regulations, and inspection regimes differ. Indeed, this is the case in Ireland. She also cited the fact that many different preschools feed into each school as an issue. As Yeboah (2002) advises, the organisational divisions which prevent the sharing of information between preschool and formal school settings need to be identified.

However, from an Irish perspective, the Early Start Preschool Project[1] is a preschool programme located within primary schools, staffed by trained teachers and preschool practitioners. This has proven to be a very successful collaboration. Children attend one year at the preschool before moving on to the Junior Infants class in the same primary school. Both the preschool practitioners and the teachers are under the general supervision of the Board of Management. Evaluation of the project has found that the Early Start preschools have been successfully incorporated into the primary school system (DES, 2002).

### 4.6.2 Beliefs about Skills Necessary during the Period of Transition

Margetts (2005) notes that children's adjustment to school is supported when they can demonstrate the skills (such as follow directions, take turns, regulate their behaviour in response to others) that are expected by the teacher. Peters (2002) studied the perspectives of preschool and school teachers in Australia on the transition to formal schooling. She found that both sets of teachers reported that the skills that were most important on entering formal education were practical skills related to independence, self-help skills, and skills such as the ability to listen, sit still, and take turns. However she noted that in practice, school teachers "*appeared to have in mind a baseline level of competence, especially in letter recognition, reading and writing*" (p91). Although in the classroom the independence and social skills were valued, the nature of assessment in formal schooling meant that literary skills gained particular significance, particularly as deficits in this area were shared with parents. She suggested that this then had a knock-on effect with parents pressing preschools for a more academic focus in preparation for formal schooling. This led to difficulties for preschool teachers in balancing pressure from parents with their beliefs about early childhood education. Peters (2002) cited studies reporting similar pressures in the UK and USA.

[1] A preschool programme aimed at exposing children from certain designated areas of disadvantage to an education programme to enhance their overall development and prevent school failure.

An INTO survey (INTO, 1995) of primary school teachers in Ireland, found that teachers prioritised oral language skills (89%), listening skills (88%), social skills with peers (82%) as being the most important aspects of the infant curriculum. Pre-academic skills were ranked least important at 22%. However in practice, a great number of teachers reported the introduction of pre-academic work during the first term of school. 44% reported starting on the first reader in this term, 46% reported the introduction of formal mathematics during this term, and 36% reported the introduction of formal writing during this term. These findings would be supported by Hayes et al (1997) who examined the experiences of four-year-olds in preschools and primary schools in Ireland. They found that teachers in schools were observed most often in teaching behaviours (35%) rather than any other category of behaviour. Teaching behaviours were defined as those involving giving/receiving of information, giving demonstrations, offering choices to the children, encouraging their activities, and providing assistance to the children. Teachers in preschools however, were found to spend most of their time (29.5%) engaged in participation/shared activities. These were defined as times when the teacher was a full participant in the child's activity.

Timperley et al (2003) investigated preschool and primary school teacher's beliefs about transition and transition practices in New Zealand. They found that although preschool and primary school teachers described their commitment to collaboration during the period of transition, in practice they had very different expectations of each other. They found that schools proposed that preschools should teach children how to behave in school-appropriate ways by familiarising them with appropriate routines and expected behaviours. Preschools felt that they should prepare children by teaching developmentally appropriate numeracy and literacy skills, and that schools should offer children opportunities to learn appropriate routines and expected behaviours through pre-enrolment visits. The study found that only 45% of schools in the study actually offered pre-enrolment visits and some of these believed them in fact to be unnecessary. These findings showed the lack of understanding of the two groups of the other sectors beliefs and practices. Templerly et al used the example of toileting accidents to highlight how the two groups viewed some events from very different perspectives. Preschool teachers cited children having toileting accidents as an example of how primary school teachers were not giving them adequate information on the location of the toilets, while primary teachers blamed toileting

accidents on the preschool teachers not having incorporated toileting routines into their centres. Again this demonstrates the different explanations given for events, and the different understandings of roles and responsibilities between the two groups of teachers, it also highlights a lack of communication between the two settings. These differences in expectations may well lead to a more difficult transition for children.

In a recent small-scale study in Ireland, Mahony & Hayes (2005) asked Irish parents about the importance of preparing preschool children for formal schooling. Of the 34 parents questioned, fourteen (33%) felt that preparation in academic terms was important in preschool. Infants classes teachers questioned in an INTO survey (Nic Craith & Fay, 2007) reported an expectation from parents that children should be reading and writing at this level, and advised that often parents do not understand the importance of play as a central learning approach in the infants classroom. Teachers may well be influenced by parental beliefs and expectations of what they children should be taught both at preschool and primary level.

## 4.7 The Professional During Transition: Policies and Practices

As discussed above, teachers are very powerful players in the process of transition. However, the exosystem and macrosystem also influence the teacher, in terms of the curriculum she has to work with, and the cultural expectations and views of teaching staff and their roles in society. This section examines the literature relating to policies and practices at preschool and primary school level, which influence the process of transition.

### 4.7.1 The Importance of Preschool Education

Daly (2002) questioned teachers in Ireland on the benefits of preschool. One hundred per cent of preschool teachers, and 91% of primary school teachers in her study said the benefits of preschool education were clear. These included enhanced emotional development and greater social development. Children who attended preschool were seen to listen, share and co-operate better, and had better developed independence skills. Mahony & Hayes (2005) asked practitioners about the importance of preparing preschool children for formal schooling. Half of the respondents felt that ECCE was

‘very important’ in preparing children for school, with another third rating it as ‘important’. Easing the transition, providing children with social skills, and providing a basic education in preparation for school were cited as reasons for this importance. When asked to select the long-term benefits of quality ECCE provision, 88% selected positive social development, and 69% selected positive emotional development.

One of the drivers in Government investment in ECCE in Ireland has been the role of ECCE in combating educational disadvantage (Hayes, 2004a). However, the limited effectiveness of such programmes and the suggestion that gains made during the early years were lost over time, resulted in calls for a more detailed investigation of how young children learn and how best to equip them in educational terms for long-term success (Hayes et al, 1997, McGough, 2002). It has been identified that in Ireland, as reported in the United States, programmes of intervention were usually aimed at school readiness, and the competencies considered to be important in terms of school start, which were very often academic (DES, 1999a). In fact, ‘Ready to Learn’ the government White Paper on Education, by it’s very title suggests a preparation for children at preschool level which will then leave them ready for primary school. Researchers in Ireland have expressed concern that ECCE, particularly the infant classes at primary level, is inappropriately focusing on achievements in literacy and numeracy, and formal instruction, when a more play-based active learning environment is more appropriate for children at this level (Hayes, 1995, Hayes et al, 1997).

Indeed, research in the United States (Homan & Weikart, 1995; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997) on three preschool curricula (an activity-based programme, an play based model, and an academic direct-instruction programme) found that on examining long-term factors other than academic progress, children who attended the activity-based programme, High Scope, scored most favourably on all measures. So although short-term academic data showed little difference between the three groups, long-term social gains were apparent. Marcon (1999) also examined the impact of three preschool models through cluster analysis of teacher-survey responses on 721 4-year olds' development and basic-skill mastery (including language, self-help, social, motor, and adaptive development, along with mastery of basic skills). She reported that children in the child-initiated model demonstrated greater mastery of basic skills

than did children in programs in which academics were emphasized and skills were taught. Children in the combination model did significantly poorer on all measures except self-help and development of social coping skills compared with children in either the child-initiated or academically directed models. In a follow-up study (Marcon, 2002) it was found that by the end of the sixth year in school, the children whose preschool experiences had been academically directed were reporting significantly lower grades as compared to those who had attended the child-initiated ECCE programmes. She concluded that more active, child-initiated learning experiences lead to later school success, as compared to overly academic preschool experiences which introduce formal learning too early for most children's developmental status. In essence, she reported "*the foundation of critical thinking may be found in early childhood experiences that foster curiosity, initiative, independence, and effective choice*" (2002, p15).

### 4.7.2 The Importance of Curriculum During the Period of Transition

Providing program continuity through developmentally appropriate curricula for preschool and primary school children has been proposed as one of the keys to successful transition (Bredekamp, 1987; Lombardi, 1992; Margetts, 1999). Dunlop (2002) proposes:

> *"children's ability to claim the new setting as their own and to benefit educationally from it, may be reflected in the degree to which their educators have collaborated in a shared conceptual framework of children's learning" (p98).*

Preschools and Junior Infants classes in Ireland may be operating in different types of settings but the commonalities between how the age groups catered for in both settings (four to six year olds) learn, and the range of developmental levels represented in each program, call for similar learning environments and teaching strategies. In practice however there are discontinuities associated with curricula in the two settings. Generally these involve the move from "*a developmental approach to a cognitive curricula approach*" (Margetts, 1999, p2). As Ledger (2000) emphasises the value of "*goal consensus between microsystems for successful transitions to be made*" (p74). Indeed Síolta – the National Quality Framework for

Early Education (CECDE, 2006b) and the Framework for Early Learning (NCCA, 2004a, 2004b) will have important implications here [Chapter 2, Section 2.5.6 and 2.5.7.]. Both will cover children from birth to six years, and as such will be relevant to both preschool and primary education at infant level. Their implementation should create more coherence across the various learning opportunities available to children in this age group, while also acknowledging the diversity of settings.

However, there is some concern that linking preschool curricula with those of formal education might result in a less play-based and more formal curricula for the preschool settings (Carr, 2000; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002a, Peters, 2002). Some researchers have suggested that this has already taken place in the United States, with an escalation of academic demands taking place in preschools, and refer to this phenomenon as academic trickle down or the push down curriculum (Meisels, 1999). Bennett (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2006) also warns against the dangers of adapting preschool education in order to smooth the path into primary school. He suggests that a greater emphasis on cognitive and academic development at preschool level is not beneficial to the individual children, who are thus deprived of a more holistic preschool experience. He asks "*How often does one come across young children not excited and thrilled about their progression into school, but anxious about whether they will be allowed to 'pass' into school!"* (2006, p.16). Carr (2000) states that it is ironic in the late twentieth century that as an awareness is developing of the importance of activity and social practice to children's learning, governments are at the same time proposing universal measures of children's achievement. These assessment practices, she suggests, have led to pressure to push down the primary school curriculum into early childhood. She states that early childhood programmes are "*often besieged by school curricula and school entry assessments*" (p19).

Myers (1997) describes a programme in the Philippines whereby the first eight weeks of schooling follow a curriculum called "Early Childhood Experiences". The basis behind this strategy is to ensure that primary school teachers adopt more active learning strategies ensuring that children make the transition to primary school more easily. However, he notes in practice teachers may find it difficult to become less formal in their teaching methods. Neuman (2002) quotes the Norwegian experience of bringing together the first four grades of school using both the pedagogical

methods of the kindergarten and formal schooling. In practice, this has lead to more emphasis on learning through play, and organisation around themes rather than subjects, in these years of schooling in Norway.

Finally it should be noted that research has shown that both preschool and primary school teachers may have concerns about linking their curricula. Brostrom (2002) found in his survey on teachers attitudes towards transition practices, that only 60% of preschool and primary school teachers felt that co-ordination of the two curricula, and co-ordinated teaching, would be a good idea. He suggested that this highlighted a resistance to bridging the two educational traditions. He linked these findings to an earlier study (Brostrom, 1999) which found educational contradictions between preschool and primary school classes. However, a national study undertaken in the U.S. looking at kindergarten teachers practices related to the transition to school (Pianta, Cox, Taylor and Early, 1999) found that 85% of teachers felt that a co-ordinated curriculum would be a positive step. One of the aims of this study is to provide an insight about the beliefs of Irish preschool and primary school teachers relating to this area.

### 4.7.3 The Role of Play

Baumer (2003) suggests that the transition from preschool to formal school involves crossing the boundary from the activity system of play to that of formal learning, and that these two activity systems are based on different rules, involving different tools and working practices. Hayes (2004a) found that infant classes teachers were observed to spend 85% of time teaching in an adult-centred way. She noted that this high level of adult-centred teaching was unexpected, particularly considered in tandem with the teacher's expressed belief that the development of social skills with peers is the most important skill for children of this age, and the child-centred nature of the primary school curriculum. Indeed, time spent at school appears to be much more of an adult-controlled world for the children as compared to their preschool experiences.

Children in a study conducted by Griebel & Niesel (1999) reported that after a few weeks they "*learned they must do things, whereas before they were allowed to do*

*things they wanted themselves, and this difference they did not like so much*"(p7.) Thomas and Sheppard (2007) draw attention to the need for a balance between child-centred and teacher-directed play, which they suggest is important in terms of children's health, well-being, and development. Other researchers have highlighted the benefits of shared learning contexts while learning through play, and the importance of interactions and relationships in terms of children's learning (Malaguzzi, 1993; Rinaldi, 1993; Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden and Bell, 2002; Brooker 2005). However, Bennett et al (1997) found that achieving high quality play-based classroom experiences involves a high level of resources, time for staff to properly engage as play-partners, time to observe, discuss and reflect on learning, and theoretical and pedagogical skill. Dunphy (2007) has questioned whether the pedagogy of the infants classroom is appropriate to the most effective learning opportunities for children at this level. She cites the EPPE research findings (Sylva et al, 2003, 2004; Taggart 2007) which she suggests provide very clear signposts for infants classes teachers with regard to effective pedagogical approaches. Theses studies identified periods of sustained shared thinking as being particularly important in terms of extending children's learning. Dunphy (2007) reminds teachers of the importance of developing a play pedagogy which provides opportunities for complex play during which the adult can support and extend children's learning. She cites lack of appropriate in-service training, time for reflection, and a limited understanding of the principles underlying this suggested approach, as being challenges to the development of a more play based practice.

### 4.7.4 Strategies to Improve Transition for Children

Both preschools and primary schools employ various strategies to improve the transition to formal schooling for children. Fabian (2000) advises that prior to school entry, schools use various systems such as school visits, talks to parents, staggered start dates, shorter school days on entry, in order to facilitate transition to formal school. Her study of 50 school starters found that on starting school, teachers also used classroom activities such as circle time or registration to introduce children to each other. They explained to pupils how things should be done in school, and encouraged children to learn from more experienced children.

School visits, either single visits or a series of visits is a strategy employed by many primary schools worldwide. Ledger (2000) in her study of children's views on the process of transition found that school visits were "*extremely important in providing the initial mesosystem link*" (p289). This initial introduction to the school environment helps understanding of the new school culture. First hand experience is important in terms of truly understanding of the school system, and the behaviour expected there.

Fabian (2002) emphasises a child centred approach to considering the area of transition. She stresses the importance keeping the child central to the process and of empowering children with the skills to cope with all transitions they face. She suggests that social competence, problem-solving skills, and self-reliance and determination, are some of the resiliency skills which will help children through this period of change. She proposes the use of story to address a range of incidents that children might encounter on entry to formal schooling, thus encouraging their thinking skills and emotional literacy. Her aim is to develop confidence in the child and to equip them with the necessary skills to make sense of the new situations they face. Having discussed possible situations that might occur, and having thought through possible responses to these situations, the child is better equipped to analyse new situations and apply the skills they have learned to resolve new issues. In this way she hopes the child acquires the knowledge that they need to predict events during the transition period and feel some control of the situation.

Dunlop and Fabian (2002) report that children they have studied in the course of their research often experience a loss of confidence during the first weeks of school. They stress that children are often undermined by the process of change, and it is necessary to equip them with the tools they need to read new situations and "*be agents in their own transitions*" (p148). They remind us that as adults we often fail to recognise the embarrassment that children suffer when have difficulty reading a situation. To enable children to avoid the stresses that accompany transitions, they suggest that we need to help children develop the skills to cope with change. However, they also add that this does not take away the responsibility of educators to work together to ease the process for the children. Dunlop (2002) suggests that continuity between settings will help children make sense of the transition to formal schooling. She suggests that

an important strategy to improve the present situation is for preschool teachers, primary teachers, and parents to reflect on their differing views of children as learners. She feels that a shared conceptual framework, between preschool and primary school teachers, of the child is badly needed in early education. Her fear is that without this coherent approach children will find themselves viewed in one sphere as competent learners, then moving to another sphere to become complete novices again.

Margetts (2002) also stresses the need for continuity in approach. She advocates the development of well planned transition programmes to facilitate continuity between the preschool and school experience. She reports that a study of effective transition programmes which were characterised by low levels of child stress, and high levels of teacher and parent satisfaction, revealed the following processes as being of importance:

- *"collaboration with other people/services;*
- *clear goals and objectives;*
- *understanding of the challenges facing children and the adjustments they need to make as they move into the first year of schooling;*
- *written plans and strategies;*
- *evaluation." (p.112).*

She reports on transition networks developed in Victoria, Australia which plan transition programmes in relation to the broader community context. This works to combat the issue of many preschools feeding into one school. These networks also provide professional development for staff in wide ranging areas to combat the divisions that exist between the preschool and school sectors. She reports a consensus among the schools she studied that, although planning a programme takes time, this is time well spent. Sensitive, responsive and effective transition programmes result in staff knowing children and parents, parents become more relaxed about their children starting school, and the children cope more easily with the transition.

## 4.8 Summary

Internationally the transition to school has been recognised as being one of the most significant times in the life of a child (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2006). This

chapter commenced with a discussion about attitudes and beliefs about how this transitions impacts on children, including the challenges of adapting to the role of school child. The skills necessary to succeed in formal schooling were then outlined, with a particular focus on socio-emotional wellbeing. Policies and practices which impact on children during this transition were then covered, including a discussion on school readiness, and the need for schools to be ready to accept children at many different developmental levels. The next section of this chapter focused on the impact of this transition on parents and families. Parental beliefs and expectations were discussed, and the importance of communication and parental involvement was noted in order that parents fully understand school policies and practices. The impact of social, cultural and transitions capital were then outlined. The role of the professional during this transition was then considered, with a particular emphasis on the roles of communication and continuity. The role of play, and the impact of curricula on continuity for children were then highlighted. Finally, it is important to note that although factors which effect the transition to school can be grouped under different headings, individual factors interact with each other. The individual systems within which the child exists do not operate independently of each other, and the inter-relatedness of such systems must be remembered.