

Athlone Institute of Technology

Going to School:

A child's transition from pre-school to primary school

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Declaration:

I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment for the award of MA Child and Youth Care is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save where that such work has been referenced and cited within the body of the research.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction	2
Literature Review	3
Methodology.....	13
Results.....	20
Discussion.....	32
Conclusion.....	44
Recommendations	45
Reference List.....	47
Appendices.....	53
Appendix A: Researcher’s Data Observation Sheet	54
Appendix B: Instruction for Drawing.....	55
Appendix C: Puppet Introduction	56
Appendix D: Children’s Questionnaire.....	57
Appendix E: Parent/Guardian and Child Consent Form with Information Sheet	58
Appendix F: Letter to School Principal.....	63
Appendix G: Letter to School Board of Management.....	65
Appendix H: Child Protection and Confidentiality Statement	67
Appendix I: Children’s Drawings.....	69

Abstract

The transition from Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) pre-school to primary school marks a significant change in the way a child participates in the family and community. When a child makes a transition, his or her experience is likely to affect their capacity to learn as it happens at a crucial stage in child development. This study considers children from first class in primary school as they have made the transition from the ECCE pre-school to primary school. The child has a huge contribution to make to our understanding of the success of this transition. What we need to do is listen to what they have to say. They have lived the experience. This study aims to give them their voice. This is achieved by utilising the mosaic approach of creative, child-friendly data collecting methods in order to consult with the children and understand their view which can then be used to inform policy. The themes that emerged from the data represented the issues that the child felt were meaningful to them from their experiences. Listening to the child was not an easy process in either preparation or execution.

Introduction

The introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme in Ireland in January 2010 has been hugely successful, with a take-up rate of 94% or approximately 60,000 children attending pre-school (Tusla, 2012). As a result, virtually all children in Ireland are making the transition from pre-school to primary school. The transition process is one which is multi-layered and takes approximately 4 years to complete (Vogler, Crivello and Martin 2008). Therefore, the first children to have gone to primary school having come through the ECCE scheme are now, in 2015, coming to the end of the transition process.

When a child makes a transition, his or her experience is likely to affect their capacity to learn and to adjust, either in a positive or a negative way. The transition process from the pre-school setting to primary school is therefore a key issue in the debate about how best to provide for children's well-being (Dunlop & Fabian, 2006). Understanding the transition process better will greatly enhance the development of policy and best practice around the sensitive management of transitions to ensure children's well-being and successful development.

In the Irish context, no work has been undertaken to understand the transition process from the perspective of the most important stakeholder: the child themselves. The aim of this research project is to identify the child's awareness and perspective of the transitioning process from pre-school to primary school. Firstly, the study will characterise the children's experiences of their transitions from the pre-school setting to primary school, giving children the opportunity to voice their opinions on the transition process. Secondly, this study will examine the listening process involved, including how children themselves feel about being listened to.

Literature Review

This literature review is based on child development, transitions in the general sense and factors in successful transitions in the early years' care and education settings, focusing particularly on the transition from pre-school to primary school. It explains what the literature has already told us about the key aspects of transitions in the early years' care and education settings. It refers to the significant international studies or research in the field of transitions in the early years' (Dunlop and Fabien, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Dockett and Perry, 2004) and also to work in the Irish context (Hayes, O' Farrell and Hennessey). In choosing to focus on the child's perspective of the transition process, the review will also consider the literature both on the rights of children to be heard and on how best to listen to them.

Child development and transition

Child development is a multifaceted process of changes occurring over a child's life incorporating physical, emotional, social and psychological changes. Views about the extent to which a child's development is influenced by nature or nurture differ, resulting in a complex interaction of biological (Bukato and Daehler 2012; Durkin, 1995) and environmental (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) influences. Bronfenbrenner's (1917 – 2005) work on ecological systems theory has made a major contribution to our knowledge of child development and influence of transitions in childhood. Recent theories have placed a greater emphasis on the child's active contribution to their own development in terms of both their individual make-up and their subjective interpretation or representation of their experiences (Wieczorek-Deering & Halpenny, 2012). Therefore, child development occurs in the context of the child's mesosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) where the child's relationship links between their families and early years' settings.

Transitions to school take place at a crucial stage in child development and also in the context of the child's relationships with family, friends and their communities. Transition in

the early years' care and education setting can be defined "as the process of change of environment and set of relationships that children make from one setting or phase of education to another over time" (Fabian and Dunlop, 2007, p. 3). The transition to school necessitates a change for the child in their relationships with their families, peers and communities given the change of social circumstances, in coming of age to attend school. Fabien and Dunlop (2007) identified the transition to school as being one of the most significant times in the life of a child.

Recent research has identified the transition from pre-school to primary school as key and that social and emotional readiness is critical to a successful transition and early school success (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Fabian & Donlop, 2002, 2007; Goh, 2012; Peth- Pierce, 2000; Volger et al 2008). Each setting has its own structure and a set of complex cultures, values and social constructs. (Dunlop & Fabian, 2006). In the shared belief of the 'whole child perspective', respectful working relationships support the child's well-being, learning and development. Positive, secure, responsive and meaningful relationships that provide consistency and continuity over time are the cornerstone of the child's well-being (Hayes, 2013).

The transition to school marks a significant change in the ways a child participates in the family and community as identified by Bronfenbrenner (1986). As children start primary school, their roles, identities and expectations change. The expectations of others on them also change as do the patterns of interactions and the relationships with other children. From an ecological standpoint, Bronfenbrenner (2005) considers that highly proximal child-level factors have the biggest links with academic growth, emphasising that the developing child influences, and is influenced by, different environments. Bronfenbrenner's framework of Ecological System's Theory (1989) situates the child's individual development in the context in which it occurs. The child does not develop in isolation but through a variety of relationships and friendships within their families, friends and society. Furthermore, the child uses their experience from previous experiences and relationships to make sense of their new situations (Donaldson, 1992). This view of development recognises that there are many contributing factors and stakeholders to the child's development and that the perspectives and expectations of each contributor shape those experiences in some way.

Dunlop and Fabien (2006) conceptualise the transition process according to their temporal dimensions of vertical and horizontal transitions. Vertical transitions deal with the physical moves and changes for the child between educational settings of pre-school and primary school due to age. Horizontal transitions involve the everyday lived experiences of a child's transition between before/after-school club and primary school linking increasing ages and environmental changes (Griebel and Niesel 2000; Brostrom 2001; Peters 2010). Fabien and Dunlop (2002) present transitions as a time when developmental demands become accelerated from pre-school to primary school beginning with preparation at pre-school level, followed by the settling-in process in the new primary school and the continuation of same until the child has become established in the new setting.

Dockett and Perry (2005) argue that school readiness, and what it means to be ready for school in terms of transitions to school, means different things for different people. There are many areas of readiness with regards to a child's entry to school including the actual child themselves, the school and family and community. The common factors underpinning the child's readiness can be described in terms of age or stage of development. At other times, checklists of readiness, skills and knowledge are used to identify what children should be able to do or know before they start school (Dockett & Perry, 2006). Other definitions of readiness emphasise social and emotional aspects. The ultimate deciding factor should be the individual child and whether or not they have reached a particular point that constitutes readiness (Peth-Pierce, 2000).

Factors in Successful Transitions in Early Years' Care and Educational Settings

Over the last two decades, it has been identified that the level of transition success between pre-school and primary school, both academically and socially is a critical factor in determining children's future progress (Dockett and Perry, 2007; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002; Einarsdotir, 2007; Fabian, 2007). Transition success can be achieved by the overall connections and interactions between the pre-school and primary settings and stakeholders as described by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1986). Bronfenbrenner (1986) argues that by providing the necessary framework for continuity of the child's lived experience, it will enable a seamless transition from pre-school to primary school. The role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences is fundamental in the sensitive management

of transitions. The competencies, qualifications, dispositions and experience of adults as reflective practitioners play a crucial role which should be appropriately shared, resourced, supported and valued (CECDE, 2006). The provision of quality early childhood experiences requires communication, mutual respect in the coordination of practice, shared knowledge and a broad understanding between practitioners, parents and teachers (Mhic Mhathuna & Taylor, 2012). Di Santo & Berman (2012) identified play and friendships as being two important characteristics in the transitioning process for children. Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child. Play is the child's language as the child interacts with, explores and makes sense of the world around them. Play is the primary focus in quality early childhood settings as children learn from each other in a dynamic and independent way by active and mutual participation in everyday activities. However, studies that have sought the child's views on transitions reveal that children expect a change from being able to play and choose in pre-school to more academic work in primary school. For example, a child can expect a change of identity within their community or know that they are going to have to negotiate a new peer group bringing about new opportunities for learning (Brostrom, 2001; 2006; Einarsdotir, 2003; 2007).

In the Early Years' Care and Education Settings in Ireland

The current approach to ECCE education in Ireland has stemmed from the nationalised quality implementation strategy of *Síolta* (2006) and standardised curriculum of *Aistear* (2009). *Síolta* (2006) is the national quality framework for ECCE in Ireland that identified 16 quality standards that all ECCE services should endeavour to strive towards. Examples of *Síolta* principles are standards on children's rights, environments, transitions, parents and families, consultation and play to name a few. *Aistear* (2009) is the curriculum framework for ECCE in Ireland, providing for the child's development through the four themes of 1) well-being, 2) identity and belonging, 3) exploring and thinking, and 4) communicating. *Síolta* takes a broad view of all factors that can influence quality in ECCE services whereas *Aistear* addresses curriculum therefore providing for children from birth to six years.

Specifically, the *Síolta* (2006) principle of pedagogy in early childhood is expressed by a programmes of activities which Hayes (2013) argues should take a holistic approach to the

development and learning of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education. Since the implementation of the ECCE scheme, this principle has been challenged by different levels of quality within ECCE provision. While traditional programmes of Montessori, High-scope, Naonaori are being taught, services are still trying to implement Aistear and Síolta. It raises the concerning question: What is the current quality of programmes? (Anning, Cullen and Fler, 2009). According to the Department of Education and Skills, (2015) practitioners have interpreted their own individualistic explanations for Síolta and Aistear for learning and development because there is little support in rolling these programmes out. Some practitioners implement a model and adapt and modify to suit their purpose and/or setting (McGarrigle, 2012). Hayes (2013) identifies the various reviews of different ECCE policies being concerned with school preparation draws attention to the high risk of too much attention being focused on literacy and numeracy and argues that childhood is an important stage in its own right (Hayes, 2013, p. 55).

The primary school curriculum provides for the child from the ages of four to twelve years. The primary school curriculum views their responsibility to the child as enabling them to live a full life as a child and to realise their full potential (NCCA, 1999). The primary curriculum in Ireland (NCCA, 1999) is presented in the areas of languages, mathematics, the arts, physical education, environmental and scientific education and social personal health education. The focus of these subjects is to provide a holistic education experience. In addition, there is a strong emphasis on individual school planning. The school contributes to shaping and adapting the curriculum in classrooms while selecting all its own resources to support its implementation.

Although children are not obliged to attend school until the age of six, most children begin school in September following their fourth birthday (Mhic Mhathuna & Taylor, 2012). Nearly 40% of four-year-olds and almost all five-year-olds are enrolled in infant classes in primary school (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). The ECCE curriculum, driven by Aistear provides for children between three years and three months and four years and six months. However, compulsory education does not commence until children are aged six years in primary school. Aistear was devised for children up to age six years, but many children start primary school earlier than this age. Aistear's play-based and child-centred framework has been designed for and intended for use in the first two years of primary

school. In contrast, the primary school curriculum provides for children from four to twelve years through its own curriculum (McGarrigle, 2012). There is a clear dichotomy in these two educational approaches. The child therefore, is being challenged at a very early stage in their development to adapt their learning styles and abilities to suit each educational setting. Clearly, there is a gap between both settings that requires closing. O' Kane (2007) identified a lack of communication between pre-schools and primary schools, suggesting that there is little congruence in approaches to learning. The child's experience of play-based activities at school supported the view that children leave behind the role of 'active explorer' in pre-school. Children learn through physically doing things and "using all their senses to explore and work with objects/materials around them interacting enthusiastically with adults and other children" (Hayes, 2013, p. 69).

This study will try to establish how children's perspectives on transitions add to the knowledge we currently have. The children's contribution to this study on how the challenges and opportunities influence their adjustment of going to primary school is in part attributable to how sensitively the transition is managed and can highlight the possible risk of failure.

Since the 1990's Dockett and Perry have published findings from their studies conducted in Australia on educational transitions, in particular transitions to school, the expectations, experiences and perceptions of all involved. Integral to their investigations of educational transitions are interviews, both individual and group. One such method, which is in line with Dockett and Perry's focus, is the 'Mosaic Approach' devised by Clark and Moss (2001). Dockett and Perry have used this type of research method that promotes child-friendly data gathering methods of play, story-telling, drawing and case studies. This study will draw on the mosaic approach. Before the method is discussed in detail, we will first consider the case for listening to the child's voice.

Recognising the Child's Voice

Prior to the 1980's, young children were viewed as the property of their parents and were generally considered to be incapable of expressing an opinion on matters affecting their

lives. This position has changed and children are now viewed as having a right to participate (Taylor, 2000). Many studies on transitions have recognised the importance of the child's voice through inclusion as a sub-set of the population being researched. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) has championed the principles of child protection and participation rights in particular in articles 12 and 13. When Ireland ratified the UNCRC in 1989 it accepted the legal responsibility in committing to allowing children to be involved in decisions affecting them. Langstead (1994) believes that listening and involving children originates within this context and leads to structures supporting children's involvement. Yet, in Ireland, the child's voice is only weighted in on decisions concerning their best interests from the adults' perspectives. This current study focuses exclusively on the child's voice in recognition of placing the child at the centre of the research process.

Dahlberg Moss and Pencet (1999) strongly argued that children are worth listening to, having dialogue with and also have the courage to think and act autonomously. A paradigm shift is required amongst professionals to accept the view that children are autonomous (Di Santo and Burman 2012). This would promote a view of the child that they are not restricted by childhood, but can demonstrate their views through the medium of a participatory process. This participatory appraisal is about empowering the child to have a voice in matters concerning them. It is as much about the process of dialogue, reflection and action as it is about the tools used (O Kane, 2000). Dunlop and Fabian (2002) report that children they have studied 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. This study aims to counter this view and offers a contribution to professionals working with children by presenting evidence that children are competent thinkers and communicators when consulted and involved in matters that affect them.

Listening to the Child's Voice

The 'Mosaic Approach' (Clark and Moss, 2001) uses multiple methods of enquiry to help the child communicate their ideas in a meaningful way. One of these methods is art. In

addition, Snow (2010), believes when words are not enough, art is a treatment based on strengths and interests as well as concerns. Art is seen as a language and viewed as self-talk, bringing insight and changes to beliefs and behaviours, while empowering children. Children's social skills are also aided in moving forward to new levels of experiences by engaging their emotions through art. Art is a crucial aspect of their overall development that stimulates physical, cognitive, emotional, social and vocational abilities (Nathan & Mirviss, 1998). In their studies with young children, Gorton (2013) and Einarsdottir (2006) employed a range of techniques from the mosaic methodology (Clark and Moss, 2001) to capture the children's voice and perspectives, offering a unique insight into the children's views.

Flewitt (2005) argues that early years' researchers should adopt a flexible, reflective stance when including children in the research process. This involves the researcher's ability to engage the children with the process by having an advantage of professional experience of working with children (Veale, 2005). Experience of working with children provides a greater understanding to the researcher having the necessary tools to understand the type of age appropriate activities the children like in order to be reflexive, while also being well placed to employ methods involving group exercises with a flexible balance of child and adult initiated conversations (Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

Barker and Weller (2003) found child-centered research methods placing the voice of the child at the centre of the research process and based upon the child's preferred methods of communication. Therefore, reflection on what might be considered as 'listening to children' need not necessarily involve communication through language but a range of different inclusive tools that are sensitive and age appropriate to each age group, moving towards listening to the child's voice as part of the process (Dockett and Perry, 2004, 2005). There is ample literature on child-centered research methods that place the voice of the child at the centre of the research process (Barker and Weller, 2003; Einarsdottir, 2006). However, the complexity of listening to the child's voice is around the fundamental ethical principles of informed consent, assent, confidentiality and child protection but is dominated from different adult perspectives and reflections on informed consent and protection of participants (Skånfors, 2009).

The Declaration of Helsinki provides a standard of international ethics in research. It states that research involving young children should gain not only the consent of the legal guardian, but where possible the consent of the child themselves. Evans and Fuller (1996) emphasise the importance and value of consulting with children, but note that research with children is hindered with the ethical considerations around the children's consent to participate. However, Davie, Upton and Varma (1996) argues that children's views are treated with more respect than before and ethical concerns can be overcome if children are correctly informed. Danby and Farrell (2005) argue that children are competent enough to choose whether or not to participate and that researchers should listen to children as competent participants, which involves respecting their informed consent to participate as well as their right to decline involvement or withdraw from research.

There is currently no single regulatory system and no organisation responsible for research ethics in Ireland. Research with children must adhere to core ethical principles of well-being, protection and safety of participants, respect of the child's rights and seek parental consent. It is good practice to seek the child's consent. The researcher must also adhere to legal commitments in relation to the national child protection policy (Children First 2011). Confidentiality has a limitation aspect when researching with children. Should a child make a disclosure, the researcher must report the disclosure as per the Children First Guidelines (DCYA 2011). However, this limitation to confidentiality must be explained during the procedure of obtaining consent. The Irish guiding document 'for developing ethical research projects involving children' outlines requirements but there is no guidance on age-appropriate language to explain this concept. In the Irish context, it is a requirement to have another 'trusted adult', or third party present while the researcher is present with the children" (DCYA, 2012, p. 8). In contrast, the UK version of these guidelines published by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) acknowledges that "in certain situations, the presence of gatekeepers is not appropriate and should be discouraged as it could potentially introduce serious bias to the data" (NCB, 2011). The UK document refers to the requirement for "gatekeepers and parents...to be carefully briefed on the neutrality of their role and understand that they should not attempt to influence or interpret the responses of participants" (NCB, 2011, p. 16). Ethical considerations that underpin early childhood

research require a great deal of thought and reflection owing to the fact that while children are competent they are also vulnerable.

In the Irish context, the absence of research on the transition from pre-school to primary school has been noted (Walsh, 2003; Walsh & Cassidy 2007; OECD 2006). “There is a certain irony inherent in the discussion of transitions, which centres on how a transition is deemed successful or not. While a transition is often assessed as being the relatively short ‘settling in’ period for a child beginning in a new setting, the reality is that the transition’s impact can only be fully evaluated over time, through factors such as curriculum, relationships, communication skills, and so forth” (Síolta, 2006, p.16) O’Kane (2007) published the first formal Irish research study on transitions and identified that the transition to school in Ireland is an adaptive process for all stakeholders. Transitions must value all stakeholders including using children in the research process to identify how best to implement best transition practice. However no formal research including children has been achieved. An exploratory study by O’ Farrelly and Hennessy (2011) investigated children’s experiences of transitions within the pre-school setting. Therefore, all of the work on the transition to primary school in the Irish context has been from the perspective of the adult stakeholder (Hayes & O’ Kane, 2006; O’ Farrelly & Hennessy, 2011; O’ Kane, 2007). We have no knowledge of the child’s perspective of transitions from pre-school to primary school in Ireland. The first cohort of children who took part in that first ECCE scheme in 2010 are now aged approximately eight and in second class, and therefore have just completed a four-year transition cycle. This study is timely.

Methodology

Research Design

The overall research design was selected on the basis that the views, opinions and experiences of children were being sought. The researcher believed the best way to conduct this study was through the selection of a creative mix of methods that would be appropriate and fun for the children concerned, allied to the idea that children are experts on their own lives and are able to articulate and contribute their views on matters affecting them.

As discussed earlier the mosaic method uses a variety of creative mediums to consult with children. This study used four such methods – observations, art work and a group discussion through the medium of a puppet and finally a questionnaire at the end of the study. The questionnaire was age-appropriately designed for children at the first class stage.

The researcher used a research diary to document the research process to record thoughts, feelings and issues as they arose. Combining these tools for gathering data, the researcher reflected on the findings collected and then over time, pieced them together in mosaic form until the interpretation of results was uncovered.

Observations are salient for the researcher in context of knowing the child in their school and social environments. The researcher's past experiences of working with children provided an advantage in the ability to engage with the children in the research process. The researcher visited the school prior to collecting data to introduce herself and to explain the study. Getting to know the children prior to the study allowed the formation of a relationship so the child was familiar and relaxed in their own environment. A data observation sheet allowed for notes to be taken and a tangible recording method to put audio-recordings in context during the analysis stage of the study (See Appendix A).

Art is seen as the child's language and is viewed as bringing insight to their feelings and thought processes, thus empowering children to communicate. Acknowledging the child's creative expression of their opinions and experiences, the researcher asked the children to

draw a picture about going to school. The researcher used a guide for instructions to indicate what was required of the children (See Appendix B).

Puppets are fun, visual aids that grab children's attention. Puppets engage the child in conversation encouraging participation through playful interactions. Toys are a child's language and therefore children may express themselves more comfortably than they would with an adult. An introduction to the puppet is included in Appendix C.

The questionnaire consisted of seven questions (See Appendix D) relating to the child's overall feelings about being asked to participate in the study. It also addressed the child's likes and dislikes about pre-school and primary school. The questionnaires employed a Likert scale through the use of emoticons (facial images) to identify the level of satisfaction. (For example 😊 Liked, 😐 No Opinion and 😞 Disliked)

Participants

The researcher approached three small rural primary schools, outlined the purpose of the study and spoke with the principal and first class teacher about how the researcher expected to collect the data. Consent was sought of the child, parent (Appendix E), principal (Appendix F), class teacher and from the Board of Management (Appendix G) prior to the study.

The ideal cohort of participants were second class children because this group represents children who took part in the first ECCE scheme in 2010 (now aged approximately eight years old and in second class) having just completed a four-year transition cycle. This cohort has also experienced the full transition from pre-school to primary school. However, due to the commitments of second class children to additional curricular activities, first class children were selected for this study instead. Participants for the study were three groups of first class children aged between six to seven years old from three different primary schools. All first classes within the three primary schools were contained within a mixed class ranging from junior infants to second class. There was a total 23 children in the study from three different settings. Children will be referred to using numbers, 1, 2, and 3 while the settings will be referred to as I, II and III. There was five from the first school and nine children from

the second and third school. Sixteen were boys and seven were girls and all children had attended pre-school. The research took place in the child's classroom with the teacher present.

Materials

Materials included the Parent/Guardian's information sheet and consent form (See Appendix E). The child was also asked to consent by signing this form.

A topic guide was used to direct the researcher through a series of prompts to focus on the specific area of 'going to school' whilst observing the children, when using the puppet and when the children were drawing.

The researcher's data observation sheet was used to document the children's actions, any social groups that formed within the focus group and notes regarding the children's non-audible contributions.

Art materials of crayons and plain white paper were used to enable the children to communicate their thoughts on going to school. A puppet was used to allow the children to interact with ease with the researcher and to make the child's experience fun, informal and positive.

A watch and dictaphone were utilised to time and audio-record the children. Finally a questionnaire was employed to gauge the children's overall feelings about taking part in the study.

Procedure

Consent was obtained from the Athlone Institute of Technology MA in Child and Youth Care Ethics Approval Committee. The potential schools were invited to participate in the study by the researcher telephoning and formally writing to each school. Upon agreement of each school (principal and class teacher) permission was then sought from the Board of Management prior to the study. The researcher then visited each school to meet with each

principal, class teacher and first class children. The researcher then introduced themselves and explained the study to the children and at that stage gave the relevant documentation to each child to bring home. This included a letter to the child's parents/guardian explaining the study, an information sheet detailing frequently asked questions and a consent form allowing their child to participate, be audio-recorded and for their child's art work to be used. The researcher agreed to return each child's art-work and to give a summary of the findings.

The researcher gathered the data by visiting each primary school on separate days. Each session lasted on average 75 minutes and was timed in all three schools so that the children would be due their regular scheduled break time so not to interrupt their normal school day. The children's current/past teacher was present at all times during the data collection.

Upon arrival to the school, the observations of the children commenced and were duly noted on the researcher's data observation sheet. The researcher arrived ahead of schedule in order to prepare and interact with the children informally before the data collection began. The researcher collected the consent forms from the class teacher and checked that all forms were appropriately signed. The researcher showed the child protection statement to the principal and teacher whom agreed that it was appropriate. The researcher then explained to the teacher that this study was only interested in what the child's point of view was and that it would be greatly appreciated if the teacher could try and remain silent. The researcher also explained assent to the teacher in case a child became upset and then the researcher would require assistance in this event.

Each session began by the researcher explaining the format of the study and what the group was about to do. The researcher explained the child protection and confidentiality statement to the children and used the designated child protection officer as the point of contact that the researcher would talk to in the event of a disclosure (see appendix H). The researcher obtained verbal consent from the children before placing the audio-recorder on. However, in one particular school one child became uncomfortable in being audio-recorded, therefore, the researcher turned it off.

The puppet (Spud) was introduced by the researcher telling its puppet story. The children engaged well with the puppet and dialogue began to flow through the interactions with the puppet. All children took turns holding the puppet during the discussion.

The children were then asked (by 'Spud' puppet) to draw a picture at the end of the discussion. Colours including crayons, markers, colouring pencils, pencils, erasers and paper were given to the children. Instructions for the pictures were given to the children by the researcher. The researcher allocated enough time for the children to draw their pictures. If a child finished sooner than expected they were given an opportunity to draw a second picture. Most children drew one picture and spent time adding details to it.

The questionnaire was then introduced to the children and the researcher was flexible as to how the children wanted to fill it in. Some children wanted to read and fill in the questionnaire themselves while others liked having it read to them and then they would fill it in.

Upon completion the researcher collected the children's drawings and questionnaires. The children and researcher tidied up the colours and papers and turned off the audio-recorder. The researcher thanked the children and told them that they would soon return with their drawings. The children went outside to play and continued on with their daily schedule.

Once all data was collected, the audio-recordings were transcribed. The responses were entered into an excel spreadsheet and a graph was generated from the results using Microsoft Excel (see Figure 1). The initial findings were discussed with the supervisor and another independent person (play therapist). The results were considered over a period of time, coded, assessed, triangulated and pieced together using the mosaic method until findings began to emerge in themes through the systematic analysis of the data.

Triangulation was the best method employed for this study due to the many different perspectives and data sources used to uncover the findings. At a later stage, the raw data was assessed on a further two occasions to ensure no results were overlooked. The art work (See Appendix I) was progressively considered over a period of two weeks to examine the meaningful symbolic content to support, validate and compare themes. The art work was also independently reviewed by a play therapist. This consistent method of data

assessment provided the researcher with the confidence that all findings within this study were exhausted.

Ethical Considerations

Consent was obtained from:

1. The child
2. The child's parent/guardian
3. First class teacher
4. School principal
5. School Board of Management
6. AIT MA in Child and Youth Care Ethics Committee

Under data protection, the audio-recordings were transcribed and then deleted from the device. The transcriptions were stored on a password protected file on the researcher's computer. The consent forms, children's drawings, questionnaires and researcher's diary were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

The researcher acknowledges that assent is a process and this was continuously monitored by the researcher on the data observation sheet during each session. The researcher visited the children prior to the study to build relationships and obtain the child's verbal consent. During the study, the teacher was present in the classroom at all times ensuring the children did not act out of character and that they did not become anxious. The researcher monitored the children's behaviour, observing and addressing any issues that arose.

Rigor

An extensive literature review was consulted and refined in this domain of the child's voice in order to form an age-appropriate approach to this study about 'going to school'. The study also passed an ethics committee minimising any risks associated with working with young children. The researcher is trained in the field of working with children. A pilot study

was employed to test topic guides, observation forms and tools. The raw data was transcribed and the researcher's diary was reflected and written up within 24 hours. This study was thematically reviewed, analysed, interpreted and findings discussed in accordance with the literature.

Delimitations/Methodological Weaknesses

The data collected suggests that the results cannot be authenticated due to the fact that the environment where the data was collected was not an open situation. The ethical requirement to have another adult present (in this study, it was the children's teacher), could possibly cause the children to act in a particular way that is expected of them and which may skew the data.

Results

This results section provides a descriptive narrative analysis of the data gathered. It identifies a range of themes in response to the research objectives which were to characterise the children's expectations and experiences of the transition process from pre-school to primary school and to establish the child's views on how voicing their opinions impacts on them. The main themes that emerged from the data were play, friends and relationships, transport to school, rules and being listened to.

Method of analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) was used to process the data collected into the format of an explanation and interpretation of the children's views on going to school. An inductive approach was used to identify a framework to collate the data and look for relationships. The data collection was circular and non-linear. The researcher had close interaction with the data using the mosaic approach. This approach created a framework for the data to be defined into categories. The qualitative data produced the children's meaningful experiences through the researcher's data observation sheet and children's questionnaire that was easy to quantify and represent in the graph below (Figure 1).

This study used qualitative data that was gathered through the means of an unstructured focus group discussion. There were no pre-determined response categories to allow the children to express their views freely. Therefore, thematic review was employed to gain insight to the children's views, feelings and experiences. The researcher arranged the data from the different sources as follows:-

- The Focus Group using a puppet
- The Children's Art Work
- The Children's Questionnaire
- The Researcher's Observation Sheet
- The Researcher's Diary

The Researcher's Data

The researcher's data observation sheet was used during the data collection to monitor behaviours of the children in their social context through their non-verbal cues and expressions. The researcher's diary recorded the reflections from the data observations sheet within a 24 hour period after each session. The field notes of these data observation sheet were co-ordinated with the audio recorded data to support the themes. The researcher participated closely with the children in the discussion to explore meanings through interpretative questions such as "why do you think you felt like that?" This helped to facilitate a diversity of opinions. The data observation sheet monitored children's assent during the data gathering process, by the researcher paying particular attention any change in atmosphere or social and emotional changes. The physical movement of the children, body language and children looking to others for support was carefully supervised to prevent social or emotional hurt. The observation sheet was recorded over the course of the data collection and assisted with the inclusion of all children, especially any shy child that may not have spoken in a while, by affording them the opportunity to participate and have their views heard. The data observation sheet also recorded the children's reactions to the puppet, the set-up of the room, other people present and time of day.

Results

The themes that emerged from the data were:

1. Work versus Play
2. Friends and Relationships
3. Travel Arrangements to School
4. Rules
5. Being Listened to

1. Work versus Play

A major finding which emerged in two settings was that children make a clear distinction between work and play. Children clearly preferred play and strongly associated this with non-writing activities, the outdoors and pre-school. Work, on the other hand, was strongly linked to the formal learning in the primary school.

Primary school was seen by the children as a formal working environment. This was characterised by its emphasis on desk work and writing. The children associated school work with reading, Irish, maths and “other hard writing things” (Child 7). There was general consensus around dislike of these tasks “It’s harsh coming to school. We have a lot to do” (Child 4). Interestingly, one child queried the rationale for formal school learning at all, asserted that they could work in the family business without going to school: “I can do the cash register, the computer, I know all the stuff” (Child 11). The more serious environment of primary school was also reinforced for the children through the use of formal titles and surnames for their teachers (e.g. Mrs Smith), rather than more informal first names which are used in pre-school settings.

Play was mainly considered to be separate from the classroom and was strongly linked to break-times and physical movement and activity. On 31 occasions the children referred to break time as the opportunity to have fun and a time when they didn’t have to think about doing ‘work’. Another dimension was the affection expressed for play outdoors. Child 9 noted “school is so boring but then it’s like ok cause we get to go outside and can be breathing new air”. Play was the children’s time off from school work and from structured activities. Non writing-based subjects were more closely linked to play, as Child 8 notes: “but sure, I much prefer, PE, Art, Science and Playtime – that is all the play we can do here”; Child 5 confirmed this view by adding “we can play dodgeball too”.

Enjoyable activities, such as play, were associated with freedom. Children commented on the freedom with which they could choose their activities in their pre-schools. Child 11 reported that she “would always paint and things” with her friends in pre-school, an activity that she missed doing, and explained that she was “allowed to do it every day and sometimes two times a day” if she felt like it. Child 8 explained that he “could play with whatever we liked” in pre-school.

Finally, in one setting this was clearly not the case. The children viewed play with their school work. They referred to their teacher as “She makes it fun for us” (Child 20). The other children supported this statement with “We do our maths with the Lego™ and our books” (Child 17) and “we can use our colouring pencils to write it in our copies if we want” (Child 22). The children discussed how they would cooperate in the mornings and decide upon what subject they would begin with “We take turns in what we do first” (Child 19). The same approach was extended to homework as Child 16 contributed “The teacher gives us our homework on a Monday and then we can decide what work we want to bring home with us. As long as it gets done before Friday, we are all happy”. There was overall agreement that this system worked for the children and that sometimes “I ask for more work because I get it done quickly and I really like doing it and then when I have it done I can read my book” (Child 21). Generally, in this setting the children did not separate play from work and the children reserved the outdoors for playing in larger groups “We can play soccer and rounders” (Child 19) The indoors was inclusive of play when learning and used smaller groups to achieve activities “while the teacher goes around and helps us all” (Child 18).

2. Friends and Relationships

Having friends emerged as a central theme throughout the study very clearly from the audio recording and in the data observation sheet where children included each other in conversations. Also, within the children’s artwork, several pictures displayed figures holding hands together. All children in this study had attended pre-school and had the opportunity to mix in a social environment. A set of twins in one of the groups provided insight to how it was never difficult to go anywhere because they always had each other to depend on. Child 12 said “we are always up early to get ready for school. We live near. So it’s really easy for us. Child 13 confirmed this by saying “I did not feel nervous because my brother was with me”.

In the social context, the children demonstrated their independence through their interactions with their peers. The children were communicating through language and their non-verbal communication skills as recorded on the researcher’s data sheet. An example of

this was the way in which children would gesture to each other by nodding in agreement or by holding a hand out for a colour when doing their drawings. In their conversations, Child 2 spoke about their arrival to school “I came to school with my cousins because I felt a lot nervous because everyone was staring at me and I didn’t like it” Child 5 claimed that this was because they were shy. “But I did see some of my friends from pre-school so after a while I didn’t get that shy anymore”. Interestingly, Children 4, 9, 11, 14, 16, 20, and 23 also admitted to displaying shyness when starting school. This type of non-verbal communication (shyness) caused the child to be nervous of their new surroundings and new people. These types of new situations emphasises the magnitude of careful management for the first days at school between the children in the formation of new relationships.

The children were confident in how they spoke and believed in their own abilities to articulate their feelings and thoughts within their relationships with each other. Child 4 stated “it was really good because I knew my friends coming to school because we were in the same pre-school together”. Individual and group behaviours were clearly established and held a sensitivity towards each other in the way the children communicated because their relationships had developed over time. While most children knew each other “except (Child10) – he was already here. We were only starting but he already did junior infants”. As it turned out, Child 10 briefly explained that he “came to this school when I was four to see what it was like and then I really started when I was five”. There was no implication here for the other children, as Child 10 was truly accepted as part of the group. Intriguingly, there was a strong opinion that required a debate on Child 10. The children were able to self-manage how they were all going to be heard and they clearly had an order within the dynamics of their group of how they were going to talk about it. While Child 10 listened to the conversation with a smile on his face, the researcher had to interject to make clear the topic being discussed; how Child 10 managed to do two years of juniors. This was considered by the group as a tremendous achievement.

Individual identities were maintained within the group. Some children were clearly able to articulate their views, others may not have been as assertive yet had established their own methods of being heard. On one such occasion, Child 2 would wait for the conversation to quieten and then say what they felt. Another time, Child 17 had a reputation within their own group dynamic for pretending to be shy, when peers would use this to their delight to

reveal that Child 17 was very clearly able to express themselves. The overall group identity shared by the children was evident through their sense of belonging together in school where they have now spent almost three academic years together.

Historically, it could be identified that the children had formed strong bonds with their peers. Prior to attending school the children spoke of their families, communities and pre-school experiences revealing the importance of having already made social connections which paved the way forward to securing new friendships in their new settings. A conversation between Child 3 and 5 showed this:

Child 3: "Did I know you? When were we introduced?"

Child 5: "Do you remember I met you at your house? Your Mammy knew my Mam and then we were introduced".

Both children elicited this significant experience, indicating the importance of social relationships in early childhood. This conversation mapped how the children were able to recall information about how, where and when they made these important strong social attachments that supported them when they started primary school. One school operated a 'Buddy System', a practical system where a senior infant befriended a new junior infant. The children explained about the "Big Buddies (Senior Infants) look after you, so we can get to know everyone in our school. Then it was our turn to be the Big Buddies". The children that were 'Big Buddies' had already experienced the transition to school and were therefore able to share their feelings with the new children. Child 14 contributed that "I was crying because I was scared when I was coming in, then the buddies helped me meet the other juniors and then we all made new friends". This meaningful exercise afforded all children involved the opportunity to increase independence by helping the new children settle in. The new children gained friends and the 'Big Buddies' were motivated by the challenge to provide support to a child starting school

3. Travel Arrangements to School

Transport emerged as a significant theme. All schools were in a rural setting and therefore many had a distance to travel to and from school. The means of transport varied

considerably from walking, cycling and travelling by bus and car or a combination of both car and bicycle. "I cycled once. On bike to school day. My Dad drove the car with our bikes to the end of the road and we cycled the rest of the way". All schools had participated in the active flag initiative and as part of this, the children were aware of their fitness and travel arrangements to school. On certain months of the year, a COW ('Cycle On Wednesday') day took place. The children took pride in their efforts to travel to school using alternative methods of transport on these days. These aspects were depicted well in the children's artwork and notably in the group discussions also. The children's art work clearly documented such modes of transport through the use of colourful drawings and speech bubbles of telling siblings to hurry on, sitting with friends on the bus, and travelling with others outside of their families.

Arrangements for getting to school also involved meeting older children and assisting younger children with bags, lunch boxes, car seats and the task of co-ordinating all people that required transport to school to assemble in the car in a timely fashion.

The impact of transport arrangements to school on some of the children reinforced the established community of relationships. Child 4 detailed her travel arrangements with her cousin and "I have to do everything she says because I am in her house 'cause Mammy and Daddy has to go to work early". Child 2 said "In the morning I come on the bus. I am always early". Furthermore Child 2 states that "If the bus doesn't come I have to come in the car, but on those days I am late". Arriving to school early makes time available for the important social interactions of play with friends before school starts.

4. Rules

Within the primary school environment the children believed that there were many new rules that must be adhered to as compared to the pre-school setting. Many children found this challenging. This was evident in the children's questionnaire and focus group discussions. One such child, Child 1 declared "I didn't like the first day of school because they didn't allow me to bring my gadgets". Gadgets were precious to this particular child and they felt aggrieved that they could not bring them to big school as they had been allowed to do in pre-school. This child (Child 1), further contributed that "They let me into

pre-school with them and all my friends used to bring in their gadgets and we would all play with them together". Therefore, rules were overwhelming for the children in primary school as little rules existed in the pre-school.

The expectation of behaviours and standards in all schools were reflected in the focus groups and researcher's data observation sheet. The children distinctly understood the rules and behaviours expected of them, through the earlier discussion of 'school work' and furthermore, in the demonstration of cooperation required to negotiate tasks. As Child 8 believed "it's harsh coming to school. We have a lot to do. I kind of like the writing but there is lots of colouring. Count me out!" The rules in school are: "Don't be a bully and no pets allowed". Noticeably in this child's statement they know that pets are beyond the boundaries of school rules but equally highlight the expression for a fun aspect attached to such rules. As regards the "Don't be a bully" rule, this child also has the awareness and sense of social justice to understand the requirement for rules.

The children had a considered understanding for rules, for their age, as regards attending school. Child 3 stated that "If I didn't come to school I'd be dumb as a pig", while Child 14 asserted "it is against the law not to attend school". Admittedly, Child 11 also claimed that they "should probably stay in school as it was against the law not to go". All 23 children had a developed understanding of rule changes between the pre-school and primary school setting and accepted it as part of their changing lives of growing up. Most children agreed that they would "prefer pre-school – you could do whatever you wanted. You could jump around and run anytime you wanted" (Child 18). "When we were in juniors we could only play with our class and these toys but we can't do that anymore now 'cause now we are big" (Child 5).

Rules as regards curriculum were a worthy topic reflected within the focus groups. There was an overall agreement amongst the children that they "don't like the writing, reading, Irish or writing Irish sentences but then when I get used to the writing, it's okay" as revealed by Child 9. Most believe that when they in an older class it will get easier. Child 11 verbalised their wish not to do Irish. "It's yucky because we speak in English and that's weird. Irish people speak English so if you're not good at Irish you have to practice Irish a lot and then much more until you get good at it because you have to do it". There appeared to be a lack of understanding as to why Irish was on the primary curriculum. The approach to

teaching the new curricular subjects does not require the same level of creativity and imagination of the child that was previously encouraged in the pre-school setting.

Rules appeared to have been deeply instilled within the children through their daily routines. This was demonstrated when the children were asked to draw their picture of going to school as part of the data gathering process. Detailed questions flowed from the children of what they were allowed to do and not allowed to do. This became the focus of the conversations. After the instructions for the drawing were given by the researcher, the children still required further details of: "Does it have to have words in my pictures?" (Child 3). "Can you do yourself walking into the school like?" (Child 8). "Can I use colours?" (Child 10). "Can I really draw whatever I want to?" (Child 14). The children were encouraged to use their creativity and imagination but evidently were used to limiting same within the rules.

5. Being listened to

In all schools the children were aware of being recorded as they made several references to the dictaphone and comments regarding being recorded. In one school, Child 6 disliked being recorded and associated it with correction.

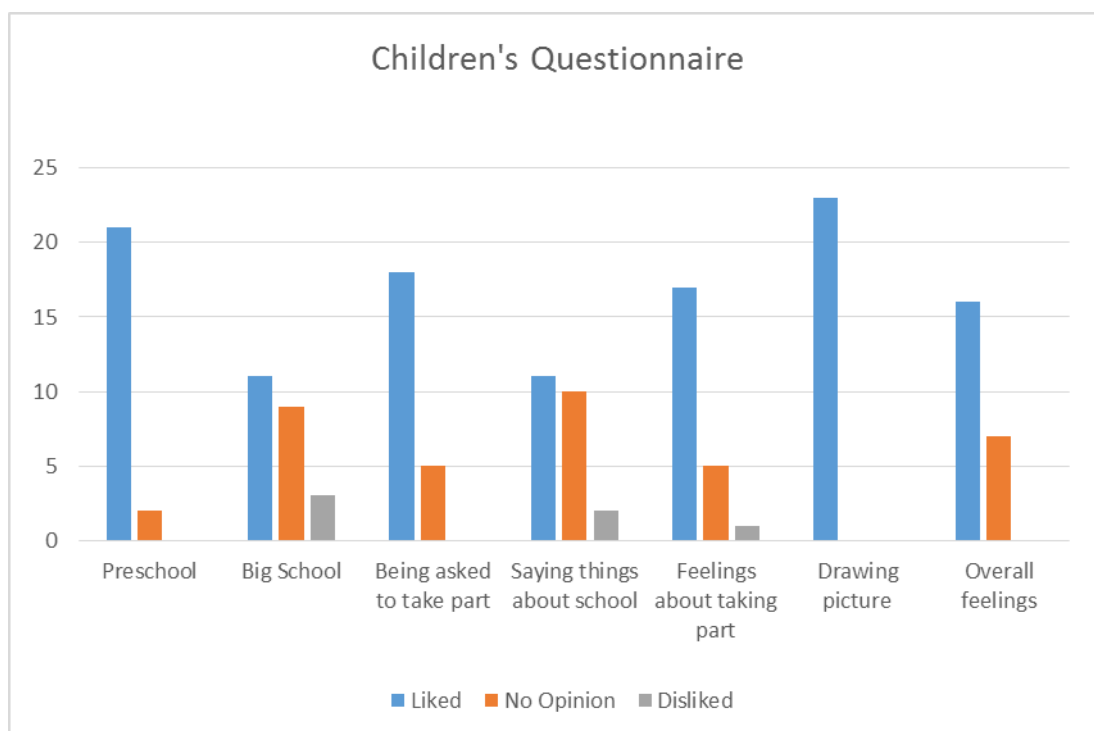
While the children participated in their natural school environment, their teacher was present in the room while the data was being gathered. From the observation sheet and audio recording the teacher influenced the children's behaviours by just being present in the room. Furthermore, Child 6 asked for the recording to be stopped. "Will someone please turn off the recording thing?" Child 13 responded to this by saying "it's okay, sound check – hello, hello, hello – allow it to play – we can hit pause and restart". This demonstrates that Child 6 had become uncomfortable being recorded as well as the fact that they had just been corrected by the teacher for their behaviour and now the child wished for the recording to be stopped. Child 11 warned: "Stop messing Ms. Smith is behind you and is going to give out". Also, the recording device created an unnatural environment for the children even though the child and parent had agreed to the audio recording.

The researcher, as far as is reasonably practicable remained responsive, flexible and adaptive to the children's needs on 12 such occasions in settings I and II. The teacher corrected or influenced situations before they could escalate or before the researcher was ready to change direction of the conversation on 18 instances in settings I and II. The degree to which the child was able to articulate their exclusive present was either currently the class teacher, or had previously taught the children). The sporadic references by the children about the audio recorder of "You do know, that this is being recorded?" (Child 5). "I forgot about that" (Child 2). "It's being recorded. Is it still on?" (Child 11). "Can we turn it off now?" (Child 6) "I don't want to turn it off" (Child 8). The data gathering was hindered by the presence of the audio recorder. Child 6 asked for the recording to be turned off. The researcher obliged. After a period of time, other children wanted the recorder to go back on and with the permission of Child 6 the audio recorder was turned back on.

The Children's Questionnaire

The children's questionnaire as detailed here in figure 1 below outlines the amount of children that participated in the study and the questions asked.

Figure 1: Children's Questionnaires



52% of children did not give positive feedback on liking primary school as compared to 91% who offered a positive opinion on pre-school. When broken down by settings the data is very interesting. In settings I and II those expressing a positive opinion on school has fallen. In setting I only 20% expressed a positive for big school as opposed to 100% for pre-school. In setting II this is 44% liking big school as opposed to 78% for pre-school. This demonstrates a pronounced degradation from pre-school to primary school. This is not the case in setting III where 100% of children liked pre-school and now 78% still like big school with no negative feedback. 100% of children liked drawing a picture about going to school. Overall, 70% of children were happy that they took part in the study.

Overall Summary of Results

To apply the mosaic method, the researcher engaged different methods and tools using the children's focus group, art work, questionnaire, the researcher's observation sheet and diary to yield rich qualitative data. Overall, the children were happy to participate and liked doing so by communicating their opinions through the all data gathering techniques used. This study was successful in achieving its objectives to elicit and understand the children's views of the transition from pre-school to primary school. Play was viewed as lost in the primary schools where play was not part of the learning process. Friends and relationships were regarded with significant importance due to these relationships remaining a constant element during the whole transition process. Closely related to the theme of friends and relationships was transport and practical arrangements such as childcare. As previous evidence suggests, rules are important so children know their boundaries prompting the rules to be similar in both settings. Finally, listening to the child's voice was the central finding of this study and the challenges associated in the research environment. The significance of the relationship between the teacher and child raise ethical challenges that need to be addressed when conducting research with children.

Discussion

Having presented findings under the themes A – E listed below, the purpose of this discussion section is to explore those findings fully:

- A. Work and Play
- B. Friends and Relationships
- C. Travel Arrangements to School
- D. Rules
- E. Being Listened to

This section will also link those findings with the existing literature, thereby ascertaining how the study adds to the body of knowledge. The first four findings inform us about the transition process, while the fifth finding relates to the field of conducting research with children.

A. Work versus Play

One of the main findings of the research was the huge importance which children during transition attach to play. While the children reported experiencing play mainly outside the primary school classroom during their break-times, children in setting III were allowed to play in the classroom. The findings show that children across all settings experienced play in all areas of learning in the pre-school setting. This however was not the case when they transitioned to the primary school setting where it was only in setting III that the children considered that they still experienced play in all areas and at all times. These different experiences of play are at odds with the curriculum as outlined in the Aistear (2009) framework. This framework outlines that play should continue to be a key feature of the child's learning experience during the transition period into primary school. Setting III is a good example of this, as the researcher learned from this teacher that she had implemented Aistear into her classroom. This study also indicates that the transition process takes a number of years. The child has an array of other issues happening in parallel and a period

of adjustment is required for the transition process. Dunlop and Fabian (2007) also referred to the time that transitions take, occurring at a critical time of child development, therefore, the child should be supported during this time through activities that encourage their learning and well-being in a highly communicative setting.

Children should be allowed to learn through meaningful, playful experiences. Hayes articulates that “Effective play is promoted and nurtured by adults who provide quality learning environments, objects, activities time and encouragement. It is through play that children explore, create, negotiate, problem-solve and consolidate their understanding of the world” (Hayes, 2013, p 48). Such activities would allow children the freedom to choose their own activities and be active learners through participation, a point that also emerged in this study. Dockett and Perry’s 2004 study confirmed the importance of allowing ample opportunities for physical movement and choice in activities in the classroom during the transition period to complement academic and social learning.

Due to the fact that play is seen as separate to the main activities of the primary school classroom, children appear to have a negative perception of learning in the primary school environment. This was evident in the many statements they made about “work” being boring, difficult and involving a lot of writing at their desks. Again, the rationale for emphasising play in the Aistear framework is so that children will develop positive meaningful experiences of classroom-based learning during the transition period. Hayes (2013) argues that placing too much emphasis on numeracy and literacy too soon could in fact cause regression.

The transition from a play-based system of learning in pre-school to a more formal learning situation in primary school can interrupt the child’s overall development as the child must adapt to this new way of learning. The experience of such a formal change of learning style can hinder the child’s ability to adapt and to learn at a time when the child is also expected to deal with several new issues. Those issues include a change of setting, new rules, policies and the formation of new relationships (Dunlop & Fabian, 2006).

While all children enjoyed their pre-school experience, recalling that time with warm memories, the children in setting III continued to speak of primary school in this way. In contrast, the children in setting I and II mainly disliked 'big school', indicating that play has not transferred into the primary curriculum. The pre-school curriculum was play-based, child-centred and responsive to the child's needs (McGarrigle, 2012). Learning and the child's development was a direct consequence of the active exploration and interactions with teachers and peers in the pre-school setting. Play, therefore, in the pre-school setting was a collaborative learning environment. On the other hand, learning in the primary school environment has now taken on a different value than the pre-school setting. It has become more formal. Play is now associated only with break times where children can leave the learning environs of the classroom. In primary school, the results in this study revealed that play exemplifies fun and classroom based work corresponds to learning according to the child's view which is what this study is about. In order to encourage learning, the curriculum must be presented to the children in the context of play. When a young child is starting primary school they are expected to make an enormous transition from one curriculum to another with little or no support. Given the fact that the children were used to child-initiated and adult-led curricula in the pre-school setting, this has led to some confusion as to why the primary school curriculum is structured in the way it is. It is early days (2010) since the implementation of Aistear and Síolta into the early years' educational setting and the challenges that the primary schools faces to introduce these ECCE programmes are that of a lack of awareness, funds to resource support and training to implement Aistear and Síolta (NCCA, 2010).

The ECCE scheme introduced in January 2010, accompanied the roll out of the "pillars of practice" being Aistear and Síolta Hayes (2013, p.47). As discussed earlier, Síolta is the quality standards for settings and Aistear is the curriculum framework advocating a play-based and child-centred-practice. Through Aistear's learning and performance orientation, children strive to understand concepts and increase their competence in them by attempting and persisting at hard tasks until they have mastered them (Hayes 2013). From the findings, it would appear in the case of setting I and II that this has not transferred or been integrated into the primary school curriculum. Interestingly, setting III had integrated the Aistear curriculum resulting in the children working through play. This resulted in the

children displaying their contentment in their experiences at primary school. This highlights the critical need for alignment of both curriculums for the sensitive management of learning styles for the children to progress socially and academically. Fabien and Dunlop (2007) identified that changes in curriculum environment carry potential to have a major impact on how children respond to learning styles. Thus, the requirement to bridge the gap between pre-school and primary curriculum frameworks maintaining the child's enthusiasm for learning (Fabien and Dunlop 2007).

The universality of the ECCE programme, now only five years old remains in its infancy and the quality of its provision requires supporting structures (Anning et al, 2009). Both Aistear and the primary curriculums are devised and underpinned by different guiding principles. In order to ensure continuity the child should be placed at the heart of policies, procedures that promote management and communication within and between the ECCE setting and primary school. The key to such sensitive management of transitions lies within the consistency of relationships (Aistear 2009, p.38). Therefore the children's lived experience should be a continuous process of relevant learning and enjoyable opportunities throughout their education.

B. Friends and Relationships

The main finding identified in this theme was the importance of having established social relationships prior to going to primary school. Children are embedded in the social world and are active in their communication with it through various verbal and non-verbal processes (Fleer, 2003). The friendships that had formed prior to attending primary school, have now strengthened and formed one element of continuous steadfastness for the child in the transition process. This socialisation prior to primary school in the ECCE setting reinforces that friendships are of vital importance to the child when making the transition to school. Dockett and Perry (2004) present that children's roles, identities and expectations change in the transition process and in doing so, so too do the expectations of others on the children. The patterns of interaction through friendships and relationships solidify to a new higher degree of commitment. These elements are clear within the findings whereby the

children are acutely aware of their new environments and the responsibility that comes with it to conform to such expectations of rules, school work and behaviours.

The Siolta standard of interactions emphasises the values of mutual respect and equal partnerships. The ECCE programmes that all the children attended provided the social contexts to lay the foundations for friendships in primary school. There are two important issues here. Firstly, that the children had the opportunity to attend pre-school prior to going to primary school providing the necessary environment to enrich their learning and to construct a social network. Secondly, pre-school and primary schools are in favour of the 'whole child perspective' but have different principles of application. Continuous relations between both settings should therefore be supported in the working relationships that will contribute to the overall child's well-being, learning and development. Dunlop and Fabien (2006) referred to the vertical transitions that change the child's relationships as they move between settings. The vertical transition directly impacts on the child's development and socialisation therefore emphasising the crucial importance of friends and relationships.

The interconnectedness between both settings as described by Bronfenbrenner (1989), acts as an ecological process that the child and social events are equally important as each other. Friends and relationships both existing and new are a testament to the child's independence, their ability to communicate and self-manage. The children in all the focus groups were able to negotiate the conversations through the established group norms that had formed over a period of time. The children in this study understood their roles in how they interacted not only with their peer group but also with the researcher, their teacher and within their community. Bronfenbrenner (2005) also advocates that children gain experience from previous experiences and relationships to make sense of their new relationships as they link different social systems through their involvement and participation within their communities.

An overwhelming point of discussion amongst the children was the nervousness and shyness displayed on the first days of school; the discussion also referred to how they overcame those moments. The children told stories of their experiences of the friends they already knew, how they met and who they are friends with now. All groups displayed a mutual comradery. One such school operated a 'Buddy System' as described in the results

section, as a very proud achievement on behalf of the children. The children having experienced the first days of school recalled how it felt like to look after a new child and build new friendships. This meaningful practical experience proved to be an extremely worthy practice of learning while doing. Through this process of the 'Buddy System' the children forged new friendships by interacting with the new children and working with them cooperatively to help them adapt to the new school environment.

The children in setting I and II appeared to perceive an inequity of the child to the teacher. Historically, the child came from an informal setting where teachers are on a first name basis and are partners in education to a more formal setting where the teacher is viewed as powerful and must be obeyed to the point that the teacher is not discussed at all. The presence of the teacher during data collection perhaps is one explanation of why the teacher was not discussed. Another, is perhaps that the child is no longer allowed to freely move around to learn or talk in the primary school setting whereas this was the norm in the pre-school setting. Thought-provokingly, in setting III, this was not the case as the children were allowed to move freely, express their views and concerns. Dunlop and Fabien (2002) found that the 'settling-in process' was a developmental demand until the child has reached their own levels of readiness and until the child has become established in their new environment. This aspect of transitions holds true in this study as the children in setting III were able to move, play and interact as equal partners in learning in the way that the researcher's diary observed the children in their environment.

C. Travel Arrangements to School

All the schools in this study were rural and required many different travel arrangements. Travel arrangements are set in social learning contexts that provide further opportunities to develop and nurture relationships. The children were happy to talk openly about their travelling experiences and what it meant to them socially. The artwork depicted this element very well. The Aistear theme, 'Identity and Belonging' lends itself to children taking part in routines and the shared experiences of families and communities. The sense of being part of a community through the child embracing differences, in this case of travel arrangements illustrates diversity, self-awareness and skills (cycling) needed to develop a

strong sense of belonging to the community and also as an individual contributing to that community.

D. Rules

Children hold rules as challenging. The expectations of the child to adhere to so many rules can be overwhelming. While rules are there for the protection, well-being and safety of the children, a considerable amount of energy, concentration and conformity that rules require from the young child is a high expectation. Hayes' (2013) view of the child is that of a holistic approach to reflect the inseparable nature of care and education. Di Santo and Berman (2012) claim that children are rules focused and worry about issues such as lack of play given the power imbalance between educators and children.

The children in the focus group had a firm understanding of the expectations on them and the legal requirements on their parents and the state to educate them. All children believe that the curriculum work of writing, reading and Irish language, will get easier as they become more proficient. The rules are believed by the child to be adult directed. While the children understand the requirement of having to learn the Irish language, the children failed to understand why this is so. Dockett and Perry take the view that the child's knowledge of rules and following of rules is of vital importance to their overall development. However this view is from the adult's perspective. Dockett and Perry note that this point of rules is not voiced from the child's point of view. The point Dockett and Perry make is that the children do not have the opportunity to co-construct rules, they have no consultation and have to conform without explanation. The children in this study, without a doubt were acutely aware of school rules and verify Dockett and Perry (2004) findings.

Instructions on the children's artwork caused some confusion for the children. This generated a lot of questions as to why they would be allowed to draw what they liked in relation to the subject of their thoughts on going to school. This indicated a lack of independence afforded to the child in the classroom and further demonstrates the power dynamic of the teacher. The power relationship between the child and the teacher has proven to be the biggest finding and ethical challenge in this study. The teacher in all settings had existing relationships with the children and consequently this impacted on the

findings. In setting I and II the teacher held a power dynamic with the children demonstrated by how the teacher would correct the children during the data collection. In setting III, the teacher allowed the children to participate free from correction or input. The children in setting I and II, were aware of the teacher's presence and accustomed to the teacher directing the class and making decisions. The teacher in setting III was frequently referred to in a way that shared the power through collaboration and negotiation of school work. Primary school education is taught through guided play and learning activities. The pre-school was taught through child-led activities. Therefore an overall balance of rules needs to be reached between the settings.

Children in their play naturally establish their own rules. Through play, the child learns self-other regulation (Mhic Mathuna and Taylor 2012). Self-other regulation is where the child gains an understanding of others' rights. This mutual respect of others needs and feelings is where the child gains cooperation with and for their families, peers, teachers and environments. The evolving rules structure has been identified by Aistear and its curriculum provides for the child to learn responsibility, negotiation and conflict resolution. If Aistear continues into primary school as is the intention it would complement the whole child perspective.

E. Being listened to

Two things emerged. First, the fact of being recorded and second, the children were conscious of the adult present. The audio-recorder proved to be a distraction and possibly intrusive in the research setting with the children often referring to it. Gibson (2012) offers a strategy to reduce such tensions with children around the recording device and suggests that "before beginning the interview, the children can record themselves saying something and then play it back, or even ask the interviewer or their peers some questions" (Gibson, 2012).

In the Irish context an adult is required to be present when conducting research and where children are familiar with a trusted adult. The significance of the relationship between the teacher and child raise ethical challenges that need to be addressed when conducting

research with children but also provides an opportunity to have guidelines devised. It further raises the issue of the trusted adult. Who should get to decide who the trusted adult is? Should the child get to pick the trusted adult themselves? Should the researcher become involved in getting to know the children prior to a study? However, the Irish ethical guidelines can prevent the researcher from becoming embedded in the children's world. As a result some children could not and would not embrace the research opportunity openly, directly and honestly as their teacher was present. Thus leading the researcher to question whether the child's natural school environment was the correct location for the study. The choice of location needs further consideration in order to balance the needs of the research purpose. While school was the obvious location for this study it was not conducive to the flow of comfortable discussion with the teacher present.

The majority of the children enjoyed the experience of being asked to take part and being involved in the study. Listening to children was central to the theoretical perspectives of this study and the approach of the methodology. As reflected in the results, the children liked being asked about their thoughts and how they felt about contributing their opinions to this study.

Informed consent and assent was given duly by parental written consent for the child to take part, be audio recorded and have their art work used in this study. Children also signed the consent form for inclusion purposes as originated in UNCRC article 12, concerning the child's opinion, being capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child. Also, article 13, was catered for in the child's "freedom of expression; including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice" (UNCRC 1989).

There may be ethical considerations around children's consent to participate (Evans & Fuller, 1996). There is a need to protect children within research settings but equally to facilitate their participation. Understanding issues from the child's perspective contributes to the protection, promotion and support of the child's overall health and well-being (Department of Health and Children, 2000). The reasons for placing significant importance on children's views are diverse and mainly stem from Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) under

the general principle “that the child’s views must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her” The issue of risk and harm to a child is a key ethical consideration. This study was considered to be high-risk because it involved young children aged six and seven years. It is ironic that a measure taken to ensure children’s well-being and safety may well have undermined their ability to express their views fully and freely. While it was considered important to have an adult present in the room alongside the researcher during the data collection, little attention was paid to the effect that the presence of certain adults (i.e. current and / or former teachers) would have on the children’s feeling that they could speak freely. Issues considered in the ethical process only related to the children involved and did not consider the adults that would be present and how they would impact on the children. A point for consideration while adults are safeguarding children with the implementation of rigorous ethical processes, is the affect the ethical process has on the child’s ability to have their voice heard and participate fully in the research due to other adults being present.

The researcher embraced playful tactics of puppetry, artwork and storytelling as strategies for encouraging participation. Drawings and spoken experiences brought about discussions to explore the range of issues raised by the children. The children were sometimes animated when telling their stories. The researcher allowed investigation into issues that opened up conversations between the children to delve further into issues. However, the children became hesitant to talk when the other adult present would interject and correct their behaviours and/or grammatical language. In striving to have participatory and inclusive strategies to elicit the child’s viewpoint, Alderson (2005) warns that “it is wrong to put children in a position which is difficult for them - one that possibly highlights that what they do not know and cannot do as opposed to what they do know and can do” (Alderson, 2005, p.186). Researchers are therefore required to be “mindful that children are sometimes keen to please adults and may not obviously look as if they are distressed” (Mukherji and Albon, 2010 p. 178). There has been a growth of creative methods in children’s research but these need to be mindful of the developing child and therefore methodologies should be age appropriate and fit for purpose.

Evaluation of Method

Overall, the mosaic approach devised by Clarke and Moss (2001) encompassed a range of different tools of gathering data and proved effective in satisfying the objectives. The data could be gathered and pieced together to form a clear picture of the children's views and perceptions of going to school. The data gathered in setting I and II was consistent. Data collection for setting III contrasted contributing to the ability to compare settings and approaches to transitions.

A particular weakness in relation to the research was that the sample was small (23 children) and the results cannot be representative to the entire population. Another possible weakness of the study is that the research environment was perhaps already biased given its location on site in the primary school setting possibly skewing the results. The time with the children proved to be short. The children would have been happy to stay longer, but constraints from their school schedule would not allow for more time. Another possible weakness of the data collection could be the time of day that the study was carried out. Two out of three were carried out in the morning when children would be more focused and alert.

The findings represent the most important concerns for the children in the transition from pre-school to primary school process. The children engaged well with the puppet in the discussion and the art work proved to be very popular with this age group. It is worth noting that the use of art with children has limitations. Firstly, not all children may be familiar with using art as a form of expression. As Veale (2005) has noted, familiarity enables them to accurately express their feelings, thoughts and experience through art, thereby making the medium a more reliable data collection tool. The second limitation of using artwork as a data collection tool is that it is open to multiple interpretations and findings may therefore be less reliable.

Following on from this study, further investigation into the child's perspectives on transitioning from pre-school to primary school is necessitated. Since the introduction of

ECCE, the process the child experiences in going from one setting to another have not been investigated or benchmarked to see if the ECCE scheme, Aistear and the overall universality of the programme is beneficial from the holistic development of the child. Studies regarding the transition to school have involved the adult stakeholders and in some cases (O’Kane 2007) have followed children but have not exclusively listened to the children from their point of view. Therefore this study on the child’s transition to school fills the gap in the literature in the Irish context. This study listened to 23 children in three different settings that participated in a focus group discussion, drew pictures and filled in questionnaires. The results were a clear dichotomy of curriculum distinguished between pre-school and primary school. The importance of friends and relationships during the transition, the travel arrangements to school and the impact rules had on the children. Finally the most significant finding was in the challenges presented in listening to what the children had to say.

Summary

In the transition period, children need to have opportunities to play, to choose their activities and to move about freely in the classroom in order to build positive associations with classroom-based learning. Both pre-school and primary school curriculums need to be integrated to support children’s learning and become more participatory. Friends and relationships can be fostered through such initiatives as the ‘Buddy System’ enabling strong attachments of self and group identity. Travel arrangements can be put in place at pre-school level which could continue onto primary school mobilising participation within communities. The rules in school could be less formal for a period easing the child into their new environments. Children should be allowed to sit comfortably, fidget or move around the as much as they like in the classroom during the transition cycle, as they find it difficult to sit still for long periods of time. Rules are learned in the social context and therefore could be relaxed while the child is in the process of transition. As with setting III, the co-construction of rules proved a valuable resource that the children too felt ownership of their own environment. Finally, ethical issues on the barriers to listening to children in relation to involving young children in research requires careful and thoughtful consideration.

Conclusion

This study has identified themes about transition that are important from the child's perspective. The Aistear curriculum has the ability to ease the child into a journey of lifelong learning as school is where these foundations are laid. In order for a transition to school to be successful it must be a positive integrative learning experience. A negative experience can have implications for the child's future education and social successes (Ramey and Ramey, 1999). The school could enable the development of naturally forming socio-cultural environments to provide for meaningful shared experiences, allowing for the formation of partnerships of teachers with children to construct meaning through social learning experiences. The rules from pre-school require integration into the primary school.

The entire focus of this study has been on hearing the voice of the child as echoed in the UNCRC (1989). To embrace the child's participation fully in the research process and to respect and recognise their views as valid, the research environment needs to be a safe environment. This way, the child can openly speak their truth without being affected or influenced by the adult's perspective. After all, when seeking information on the child's transition it is best to ask the expert – the child. The transition from pre-school to primary school is often spoken about in the presence of children but not in-depth with them, thereby excluding them. This has led to the child negotiating their way through the transition process from an adult-led perspective and not their own experiences. While there are many stakeholders in the transition process, the focus must be a child-centred approach and such approaches need to be age-appropriate and sensitively managed.

Recommendations

Objective 1: To identify the child's expectations, awareness and perspectives of the transitioning process from pre-school to primary school.

1. The primary school curriculum needs to be reviewed to incorporate the Aistear curriculum for the junior and senior infant classes. Primary school teachers need time, training and resources to implement a play-based approach to learning and move from the traditional didactic methods of teaching. The Aistear framework will contribute to a play-based and child-centred approach to learning but other issues relating to class size, lack of appropriate space and insufficient curriculum guidance needs to be addressed first.
2. Communication between pre-school and primary school requires open communication strategies and mutual respect in the coordination of practice, shared knowledge and a broad understanding between practitioners, parents and teachers to manage transitions sensitively.
3. The Buddy System could benefit all children across primary schools, contributing to the child's active role in their school environment, giving a point of contact to meet new friends and engaging the children's sense of group identity.
4. The universality of a primary school open day where the children can visit their new school environments, meet teachers and get a flavour of what it is going to be like would contribute to the child's positive outlook on learning while being an active citizen in their communities.

Objective 2: Characterising the children's views of voicing their opinions on matters directly affecting them.

5. Ethical issues at application stage must be considered and provided for in relation to involving young children in research and the power plays that adults have with children that could possibly influence young children's views. It is with this in mind that a clear set of guidelines could be utilised for other observers in the research environment.
6. The researcher could spend more time with the children prior to the study to get to know group norms and to enjoy the everyday experiences. In doing so, this would elicit children's perspectives in a more natural environment as relationships would form and eliminate the possibility for the requirement of another adult present to observe the children.
7. The research environment should perhaps be on neutral territory to prevent bias interfering with the data gathering.
8. The researcher should be specifically trained in the skills needed while conducting research with children. Tuning in to children and applying active listening skills in order to carefully hear what a young child is saying is critical. This skill could be developed and improved through a series workshop style training sessions. During these sessions, through the use of role play the researcher is exposed to various situations which force them to clarify the children's ideas by reciprocating what the researcher feels the message is that the child is trying to convey. This training will assist them to develop and engage

in effective strategies for shared and meaningful conversations with the young child.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Researcher's Data Observation Sheet

Data Observation Sheet

- Verbal consent from children
- Atmosphere
- Brightness/ Day light/ Air/ Stuffiness
- Time of day
- Noise levels
- Smells
- Set up of room (tables/chairs etc.)
- Other people present
- List of children present – all included in conversations

Reactions to the puppet

Happy

Sad

Funny

Worried

General

Change of atmosphere

Children engaged

All children involved – any shy child

Emotional changes

Social interactions

Physical movement of children (seated floor/chairs)

Body language

Children looking to others for social support

Assent

Appendix B: Instruction for Drawing

Instruction to children for drawing the picture

Now that we have all had a chat about what we thought and what happened when we went to school, I would really like for the next part of the study if you could draw a picture to show me all about you going to school.

You can draw and colour whatever you decide. While you are drawing your pictures I will be asking you to tell me about your pictures. I have lots of colours and paper for you to choose from.

For my study I will take all your pictures home with me but I will return them very soon in May. Can you please write your name on the back of the picture so I will know who owns which picture?

Thank you.

Appendix C: Puppet Introduction

Using 'Spud Puppet'

When a puppet speaks, children listen, identify, and understand because it is playful. Spud the name given to the puppet is to de-humanize it so children can relate to the human features of the puppet but not align themselves with it because of its name. Children can project their feelings better through playful interactions with a puppet by creatively speaking via the puppet directing attention away from them (the child) and onto the puppet.

Spud Puppet Introduction

Hi, my name is Spud - Spud Puppet. I live next door to this school and every day, I go to school and meet all my friends. At the very beginning I didn't know everyone here but now I do.

One day, I was a bit sick and my Mum said that I was not allowed to go to school. I looked at all my friends passing by my house on the way to school. I knew my friends were going to have lots of fun at school and I was at home sick!

When school was over - my friend Ruby came to visit my house with her Mum. Ruby seemed sad and happy! I couldn't really figure it out? I guess Ruby missed me at school or maybe something happened at school and now I'm sad! No, perhaps Ruby is happy after all. It was driving me crazy, so, I asked her. . . . "Ruby you seem sad and happy – why is that?" Ruby replied "I'm happy to see your much better Spud – but I missed you at school. Will you be back tomorrow?"

The next day, Spud went back to school because he felt much better and was very happy to talk to all his friends. He spent all of yesterday at home feeling sad and watching all the children coming and going to school. He never wanted to be sick again!

Appendix D: Children's Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Questions

Answers

Did you like going to pre-school?

Did you like going to big school?

Were you happy about being asked to take part?

Did you like saying things about going to school?

How did you feel taking part today?

Did you like doing the picture about going to school?

Are you happy you took part today?

Appendix E: Parent/Guardian and Child Consent Form with Information Sheet

Consent Form

DATE

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Please indicate below if you will allow your child to participate in the 'Going to School' study by ticking the boxes below and by signing your name. As this study is on the views of children I would also like to give your child the opportunity to consent by signing also.

If you are happy for your child to participate please return the form on or before Thursday 26 March.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Aileen O Reilly (*Masters in Child and Youth Care – Athlone Institute of Technology*)

	YES	NO
I give permission to my child _____ (<i>child's name</i>) to participate in the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for my child's art work to be included in the final document.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for my child to be audio recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Child's signature _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature _____

**“Going to School” – The Child’s Perspective on making the
Transition from Pre-school to Primary School**

DATE

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Aileen O Reilly. I am currently undertaking a Masters in Child and Youth Care in Athlone Institute of Technology. For my final thesis, I am carrying out a research project entitled “Going to School – The Child’s Perspective on making the Transition from Pre-school to Primary School”. This study will help me to understand the child’s feelings, beliefs and experiences about the transition process from pre-school to primary school.

There is a frequently asked list of questions attached to give further information about how the study will be conducted.

If you would like your child to participate please return the consent form by DATE.

Should you have any further questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me directly on 000 123 45678.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Aileen O Reilly

(Masters in Child and Youth Care – Athlone Institute of Technology)

Frequently Asked Questions

Who am I?

My name is Aileen O Reilly; I have a wealth of experience and knowledge of working with children for the last 17 years. As part of my continuous professional development I decided to return to education and study the Masters programme in Child and Youth Care in Athlone Institute of Technology.

What does this study involve?

I would like to visit your child's classroom and talk to the First class children for approximately one hour about their experiences and views about starting school and what they liked or disliked about it.

What does my child have to do?

I will have a group discussion with the children using a puppet, then I will ask the children to draw a picture about going to school and finally to fill in a simple questionnaire on if they liked doing the study and if they enjoyed the experience.

Ethical concerns?

I have received ethical approval from the ethics board in Athlone Institute of Technology. In line with Children First - the National Guidelines that promotes the protection of children, I intend to protect the identity of all children; however there are ethical and legal limits to confidentiality. If during the study a child reveals that they are abused or at risk of abuse, this information will be passed onto the Child Protection Officer in the school and in the Health Service Executive.

What are the benefits to my child participating in the study?

This study provides the opportunity for your child to become actively involved by participating in a research study. This occasion offers the understanding of the research

process by your child giving consent and the opportunity to be heard in a research setting and have their voice heard.

What are the risks to my child participating in the study?

If your child has had an unfavourable experience in making the transition to primary school the group discussion may recall this experience and cause your child some upset. It is for this purpose that a familiar person will be present during the study.

Who will be present during the study?

I will be conducting the study with the children and a teacher will also be present during this time.

Is participation necessary?

No, participation in the study is voluntary; your child does not have to partake.

What if my child wants to partake?

Please fill in the consent form and return before DATE

What if my child does not want to partake?

If you do not wish your child to partake, there is no need to sign the consent form. Your child can continue with regular class activities if they do not wish to partake.

What happens if my child does participate and then decides not to proceed in the study?

If your child participates initially, but then indicates that s/he does not wish to continue, s/he can withdraw from the study and continue with regular class activities.

What will happen to all the information gathered from the study?

All the information that I will gather will be used to help me gain insight to understand the child's perspective of making the transition to primary school. This will form the basis for my thesis.

Will the information be confidential?

All information gathered will remain confidential between me and my supervisor for the purpose of this study and no identifying information like child's name, teachers name or name of school will be included in the study. The responses each child gives will be not be identifiable in any document produced. Each child will remain anonymous.

Where will the information be stored?

All information gathered will be stored and on my computer protected by a password and drawings and questioners in a locked filing cabinet. All information which identifies any individual will be will be destroyed in May 2015.

Will I be made aware of the findings of the study?

I will return to the school with a summary of the findings in May 2015 where I will return the children's artwork and tell the children what I learned from doing the study.

Appendix F: Letter to School Principal

School Principal

National School

County

Date

Re: Athlone Institute of Technology: Masters in Child and Youth Care Thesis

Dear Principal,

Thank you for agreeing to allow your school to take part in the study. For my final thesis, I am carrying out a research project entitled “Going to School – The Child’s Perspective on making the Transition from Pre-school to Primary School”. This study will help me to understand the child’s feelings, beliefs and experiences about the transition process from pre-school to primary school.

For the purposes of this study I would like to visit first class children for approximately one hour to hear about their experiences and views about starting school and what they liked or disliked about it. I wish conduct a group discussion using a puppet, ask children to draw a picture about going to school and ask the children to fill in a simple questionnaire on if they liked doing the study and if they enjoyed the experience.

The child’s participation in the study is voluntary; and the child does not have to partake. I can assure that the responses, art work and questionnaire each child gives will not be identifiable in any document produced. Each child will remain anonymous. All information will remain confidential between me and my supervisor for the purpose of this study and no

identifying information will be included in the study. All data which identifies any individual will be destroyed in May 2015. A summary of the findings can be made available to the children and the school along with the children's artwork.

It is the preference of Athlone Institute of Technology Ethics Committee to have permission for the study to be carried out from the Chairperson of the Board of Management.

If I am to conduct the study where there are other children present in the room, I would need to seek permission from the other children's (all except 1st class) parents as I understand it's a mixed class. Alternatively I could talk to the children in a separate room and would only require first class parental consent only but then I would need another person present with me. My preference would be as little disturbance as possible for you and the children. I appreciate that this may be inconvenient and I certainly would like this to go as smoothly as possible.

I have attached the parent's information sheet, consent form and my Garda Clearance form.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly on 000 123 45678. Thank you very much for your help and I look forward to conducting the study in your school.

Yours sincerely,

Aileen O Reilly

(Masters in Child and Youth Care – Athlone Institute of Technology)

Appendix G: Letter to School Board of Management

To the Board of Management,

National School

County

DATE

Re: Athlone Institute of Technology: Masters in Child and Youth Care Thesis

To whom it may concern,

My name is Aileen O Reilly, I am currently undertaking a Masters in Child and Youth Care in Athlone Institute of Technology. For my final thesis, I am carrying out a research project entitled "Going to School – The Child's Perspective on making the Transition from Pre-school to Primary School". This study will help me to understand the child's feelings, beliefs and experiences about the transition process from pre-school to primary school.

For the purposes of this study I would like to visit first class children for approximately one hour to hear about their experiences and views about starting school and what they liked or disliked about it. I wish conduct a group discussion using a puppet, ask children to draw a picture about going to school and ask the children to fill in a simple questionnaire on if they liked doing the study and if they enjoyed the experience.

The child's participation in the study is voluntary; and child does not have to partake. I can assure that the responses, art work and questionnaire each child gives will not be identifiable in any document produced. Each child will remain anonymous. All information will remain confidential between me and my supervisor for the purpose of this study and no identifying information will be included in the study. All data which identifies any individual will be destroyed in May 2015. A summary of the findings can be made available to the children and the school along with the children's artwork.

Following the feedback I received from Athlone Institute of Technology Ethics Committee I have been requested for further permission from you the Board of Management in order for me to proceed with this study.

If I am to conduct the study where there are other children present in the room, I would need to seek permission from the other children's (all except 1st class) parents if I am to carry out the study in the children's classroom as understand it's a mixed class.

Alternatively I could talk to the children in a separate room and would only require first class parental consent only but then I would need another person present with me. My preference would be as little disturbance as possible for you and the children. I appreciate that this may be inconvenient and I certainly would like this to go as smoothly as possible.

I have attached the parent's information sheet, consent form and my Garda Clearance form.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly on 000 123 45678. Thank you very much for your help and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Aileen O Reilly

(Masters in Child and Youth Care – Athlone Institute of Technology)

Appendix H: Child Protection and Confidentiality Statement

Verbal Script

“Hello, my name is Aileen and I go to college in Athlone Institute of Technology. I have worked with a lot of children and as part of my work in college I would really like to hear all about your experience and what you thought about going to school. If anybody has questions you can ask me at any time but before I tell you more about my study I would like to talk about a few very important things involved in a study.

- You can decide if you want to take part in this study or not.
- You can say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’.
- Because we are all friends nobody will be upset if you say ‘No’.
- If you say ‘Yes’ and then decided that you don’t want to - you can always say ‘No’ later.
- Actually, you can say ‘No’ anytime at all.

About the Study

Now, let me tell you about my study.

If you would like to join in the study that would mean that a group of us and (other adult) will go to another room where we will all have a chat with ‘Spud’ the puppet! Spud has a little story all about when he went to school and then we can all talk together about when we went to school. Next, we will draw a picture about ‘going to school’ and I have lots of colouring crayons, markers and colouring pencils. At the end I have a questionnaire – that’s a piece of paper with questions with different kinds of faces on it as answers and you can circle which face you like as your answers to the questions.

Confidentiality and Bullying

Now, something also very important that I must tell you, sometimes when we talk in our class we can say things that are funny or sad or even a bit silly, but because we are all

friends here and this study is very important work we will work together and not make any of our friends feel bad about what they say. Is that okay with everybody?

Child Protection

If you tell me that something bad is happening or if something is making you feel sad or hurt. I will have. Then I will have to tell your teacher. So, I would like you to have a think about that and if you would like to join in the study and remember you only have to join in the study if you want to.

Appendix I: Children's Drawings







