



MONASH University

Reframing transitions to school as continuity practices

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Abstract

The terms ‘early childhood’ and ‘early years’ are internationally ascribed to the education and care of children from birth to eight years. In Australia, this period spans the pre-compulsory and compulsory school sectors. Historically, these sectors have been shaped by different practice traditions resulting in discontinuities that affect transitions from one to the other. Traditionally, efforts to enhance continuity by diffusing sectorial differences (e.g., by blending pedagogy and/or curriculum) have been resisted by professionals in both sectors. Departing from this tradition, this thesis reports the findings of a site-based cross-sectorial action research study, and investigates how – or even if – negotiating shared understandings of practices might enhance continuity during transitions to school. Following a critical participatory approach, the participants of the study formed the Building Bridges Professional Learning Community (BBPLC) as an intersubjective space to investigate shared concerns about transitions to school practices. Meeting regularly, the members of the BBPLC engaged in critical conversations to interrogate understandings of their practices and contest the conditions, including sectorial differences, enabling and constraining these. These conversations were recorded and constitute the evidence presented in this thesis. Analysis of this evidence reveals how the actions undertaken within the BBPLC enabled the negotiation of shared understandings of practices, which in turn worked to reframe transitions to school as relational, policy and practical continuity. The research makes three significant contributions to the field. First, it adds to an emerging critical discourse of transitions to school as continuity practices. Second, it offers a new theoretical perspective to examine the conditions enabling and constraining continuity. Third, it provides a site ontological perspective of transitions to school to account for the happening-ness of practices, and offers a framework for considering transitions as continuity practices.

Thesis including published works declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

This thesis includes four (4) original papers published in peer reviewed journals and one (1) published chapter in a peer reviewed book. The core theme of the thesis is transitions to school. The ideas, development and writing of all papers in the thesis were the principal responsibility of myself, the student, working within the Faculty of Education under the supervision of Professor Susan Grieshaber, Associate Professor Jane Wilkinson and Associate Professor Anne Petriwskyj. The inclusion of co-authors reflects the fact that the work came from active collaboration between researchers and acknowledges input into team-based research.

Thesis Chapter	Publication Title	Status	Nature and % of student contribution	Co-author name(s) Nature and % of Co-author's contribution	Co-author(s), Monash student Y/N
2	An integrative review of transitions to school literature	Published (2018)	Tess Boyle (70%) Created conceptual framework; developed the review design; conducted literature search/analysis; developed paper frame; drafted manuscript sections; responded to editorial feedback; managed publication/submission processes (submitted to more than one journal).	<p>Susan Grieshaber (15%) Initiated idea of submitting to ERR; convinced student of appropriateness of journal; provided ongoing critique and analysis of conception, design, organisation and management of literature, analysis processes and related conference presentations; drafted one manuscript section; provided critical analysis and editorial feedback on drafts.</p> <p>Anne Petriwskyj (15%) Guided literature selection; cross-checked matrices; critiqued and debated analysis; drafted points for final sections; reviewed manuscript revisions.</p>	<p>No</p> <p>No</p>

5	Linking learning: Developing cross-sector policies for transitions to school	Published (2017)	Tess Boyle (60%) Created conceptual framework; developed the research design; conducted the literature review, data collection and analysis; developed paper frame; drafted manuscript sections; responded to feedback; assisted in the publication, review and submission process.	Susan Grieshaber (40%) Invited student to co-author chapter; detailed guidance on genre and structuring a chapter; assisted in research design; guided, modelled and critiqued data analysis and interpretation; drafted manuscript sections; provided critical analysis and editorial feedback on manuscript drafts.	No
6	Transitions to school: Reframing professional relationships	Published (2014)	Tess Boyle (70%) Created conceptual framework; developed the research design; co-developed the literature review; conducted data collection; co-constructed the analysis; developed paper frame; drafted manuscript sections; responded to editorial feedback; managed publication, review and submission process.	Anne Petriwskyj (30%) Assisted in the research design; guided and modelled data analysis; co-developed literature review; cross-analysed samples of data; critically reviewed manuscript writing and revisions.	No
7	Two worlds, one site: Leading practices and transitions to school	Published (2018)	Tess Boyle (80%) Created conceptual framework; developed the research design; co-conducted the literature review; conducted data collection; co-conducted data analysis; developed paper frame; drafted manuscript sections; managed publication, review and submission process.	Jane Wilkinson (20%) Guided and modelled data analysis; co-developed literature review; critically reviewed manuscript writing and revisions.	No
8	Reframing transitions to school as continuity practices: The role of practice architectures	Published (2018)	Tess Boyle (80%) Established the conceptual/theoretical framework; developed the research design; conducted the literature review; developed paper frame and transitions model; drafted manuscript sections; responded to feedback; managed publication, review and submission process.	Anne Petriwskyj (10%) Debated structure of paper and manuscript sections; provided input about content and references; refined manuscript sections; responded to editorial feedback. Susan Grieshaber (10%) Made initial suggestion about article and content for Australian audience; suggested change to different journal when article changed; provided conceptual feedback about model; provided input about structure of article; edited article prior to submission; responded to editorial feedback.	No No

I have re-numbered the pagination of the publications in order to generate a consistent presentation within the thesis. The tables, figures and appendices have also been re-numbered. Also, to reduce unnecessary duplication and volume, one consolidated reference list (formatted in APA 6 referencing style) has been included at the end of the thesis.

Student signature:

Date: 31.10.18

The undersigned hereby certify that the above declaration correctly reflects the nature and extent of the student's and co-authors' contributions to this work. In instances where I am not the responsible author I have consulted with the responsible author to agree on the respective contributions of the authors.

Main Supervisor signature:

Date: 31.10.18

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis by publication reports the findings of a cross-sectorial study investigating how, or if, establishing shared understandings of practices might enhance continuity during transitions to school. Following Paltridge and Starfield's (2007) structure, the chapter opens by identifying the research terrain as the two worlds of early childhood education and care. Situating the study in the Australian state of New South Wales, the chapter presents the background to the study and foregrounds the "practice traditions" (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer, & Bristol, 2017, p. 31) influencing understandings and practices within the two worlds. Then, the scope is narrowed and the niche¹ within the terrain under investigation, namely cross-sectorial professional perspectives of transitions between the two worlds, is identified. Next, details of the way the study occupies this niche including the research aim, question and approach are explained. Finally, the thesis structure and significance of the research are discussed.

Establishing the research terrain: Two worlds

The term 'early childhood' and 'early years' are used to define the period of time encompassing the education and care of children from birth to eight years (Kagan, 2010; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007). In many countries, including Australia, this phase spans the pre-compulsory and compulsory school sectors, resulting in "split systems" (Kaga, Bennett, & Moss, 2010, p. 15) that impact on continuity of learning and development as children transition from one to the other (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017). These sectors, identified by Dunlop (2007) as "two worlds" (p. 165), have evolved from different philosophical foundations, which over time have resulted in different "practice traditions" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31). The following historical overview sets the scene for the study and highlights systemic differences that continue to shape the conditions enabling and constraining transitions practices. Acknowledging the site of the study, the following section focuses on the Australian state of New South Wales.

¹ In this structure the term 'niche' is used to identify the researcher's position within the wider the research terrain.

The history of Australia's early childhood education and care systems continues to influence current practices, policies and philosophies (Ailwood, 2007). Upon arriving at the colony of New South Wales in the late 1700s, British migrants established systems based on western-centric ideologies. By 1800, the population of European children in this colony alone had increased from the 26 who arrived on the First Fleet to 725 (Mellor, 1990). By 1829, there were 5,754 children under the age of 12 in New South Wales (Wilkinson, 2008). The proliferation of this young population, characterised by destitution and poor health, led authorities and influential citizens of the day to consider these children to be in dire need of care and protection (Fabian & Loh, 1980). Subsequently, three distinct responses to the provision of education and care emerged: i) the establishment of schools (Wilkinson, 2008); ii) the introduction of the Kindergarten Movement (Harrison, 1985); and iii) the introduction of Day Nurseries (Huntsman, 2005). Each of these responses, influenced by dominant and at times competing views of childhood, formed "practice traditions" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31) that continue to inform our understandings of early childhood education and care.

Soon after the colony of New South Wales was settled, denominational, government and privately funded institutions –collectively referred to as 'schools' – were established. Those influenced by Locke (1693) and the Reformation movement sought to save the delinquent child and instil good work habits, morals and self-respect, often through rewards and punishments (Mellor, 1990). Others, influenced by Rousseau (1911), Pestalozzi (1894) and Froebel's (1887) romanticised notions of childhood, sought to educate by providing learning environments characterised by nurture, care and sensate experiences (Press & Hayes, 2000). During this time, schools were unregulated, enacted different curricula and were attended by children as young as three years old (Vick, 2004). The *Public Instruction Act 1880 (NSW)* instigated significant changes to the provision of education and care in the colony, including both the introduction of free, secular and compulsory education for all children between the ages of six and fourteen and the withdrawal of state aid to denominational schools. Under this Act, control of primary and some secondary schools was

assigned to a government department led by the Minister of Public Instruction, who was answerable to Parliament (Wilkinson, 2008). At this time, teacher training followed an apprenticeship model, whereby pupil teachers attended courses at model schools. These courses played a fundamental role in establishing “normative understandings of education, teaching and learning ... consistently portraying classroom instruction as the main feature of the teachers’ work” (Allen 2004, p. 90). During the Depression of the 1890s, government expenditure on schools was cut dramatically, resulting in the exclusion of all children under six years of age. This action heralded the separation of the pre-compulsory and compulsory school sectors (two worlds) of early childhood education in New South Wales.

Concerns about the provision of education and care services for children under six years of age led to the establishment of the Kindergarten Union in 1895 and later the Sydney Day Nursery in 1905. While both of these institutions were established to provide education and care in the pre-compulsory sector, their histories evidence fundamental differences resulting in different “practice traditions” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31) within the pre-compulsory sector. The Kindergarten Union (KU) of New South Wales espoused the belief that “attendance at kindergartens run by ‘refined and womanly women’ would counteract ‘the bad habits and harmful things’ learnt in the streets by the children of the poorer classes” (Brennan, 1998, p. 18). The first free kindergarten was opened in 1896 and the first Kindergarten Training College opened the following year. Influenced by Froebel’s (1887) kindergarten principles and play-based approaches to learning and development, the KU argued that school-based teachers were too focused on curriculum instruction and not focused enough on the development of the child (Brennan, 1998). Kindergarten Union programs were in turn censured by school-based advocates for being elitist because they excluded children under three years of age, operated from 9 am to midday, and only recruited refined ladies (Brennan, 1998; Mellor, 1990). This philosophical discord became a source of tension that later led to the demise of collaborations between the KU and schools (Mellor, 1990). The 1904 Royal Commission into the state’s birth and mortality rates noted the absence of services for children under three years

of age and recommended that an additional organisation be established to care for the very young children of working mothers (Brennan, 1998). In 1905, the Sydney Day Nursery (SDN), was established to provide “a place staffed by nurses and assistants with a Matron in charge where children under school age, including babies, of mothers in the paid workforce, were looked after for a small fee” (Huntsman, 2005, p. 11). The SDN services were primarily dedicated to the health and development of children from birth to six years of age and operated between 7am and 6pm.

In the post-World War II milieu, efforts to rebuild the Australian economy (e.g., immigration and women’s participation in the workforce) led to increased demand for education and care in both the pre-compulsory and compulsory school sectors (Allen, 2004). By 1954, the KU of New South Wales, now a member of the Australian Pre School Association, continued to position itself at odds with the SDN Association by operating under the premise that it was “undesirable for children under three years of age to be in groups” (Brennan, 1998, p. 55). During the 1960s the pre-school movement gathered momentum and, following initiatives such as the Head Start Program in the United States, moved further from the original philanthropic aims of social reform to the provision of education (Mellor, 1990). Appropriating features of the school system (e.g., following school term dates, hours and holidays) meant that working families could not easily access the KU pre-school programs. In response, alternative pre-school programs (Nursery Schools) were provided by SDN. However the disparities and tensions associated with status and conditions of teachers within the pre-compulsory sector prevail to the present day (Nolan & Rouse, 2013).

The federal *Child Care Act 1972*, passed to facilitate the workforce participation of mothers with young children, marked the beginning of the Commonwealth government’s large-scale involvement in the pre-compulsory sector. Acknowledging that quality affordable care was beyond the reach of many families, funding was linked to quality metrics such as staffing ratios and qualifications (Brennan, 1998). In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments endorsed a National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood which encompassed a number of reforms collectively known as the *Early Years Reform Agenda*. Elements of this agenda shaping transitions

practices reported in this thesis include: the introduction of national learning/curriculum frameworks; universal access to quality pre-school programs for children aged four years; and the early childhood workforce strategy (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012). The introduction of Australia's national curriculum/learning framework engendered a sense of optimism given it would provide, for the first time in history, a consistent touchstone across the sectors to consider and plan for continuity of learning and development. Yet there is no mandate to, and little support for, teachers in NSW to engage in cross-sectorial transitions practices (Barblett, Barratt-Pugh, Kilgallon, & Maloney, 2011). However, since the introduction of universal access in 2006, funding participation rates in pre-school programs have steadily increased. In 2017, 72 % of the programs delivered in New South Wales were in Long Day Care (LDC) centres (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Considering these increased participation rates and the shift to the provision of pre-school programs in LDC centres, it is incongruous that practice traditions associated with power and status within the pre-compulsory and across the sector endure (Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011). It is equally perplexing to consider the logic that preserves the absence of structural (systemic) support for cross-sectorial continuity as children transition to school.

In New South Wales, children are eligible to start school if they turn five before June 30th, and they must be enrolled in the year they turn six. This 18-month window for enrolment presents a dilemma for many parents, who must decide when their child should start school. A multi-variate analysis of starting ages in Australia showed that the percentage of delayed enrolments in New South Wales was 31.3 %, three times higher than any other state (Edwards, Taylor, & Fiorini, 2011). Factors influencing parents' decisions to delay enrolment include but are not limited to gender (more boys than girls were delayed), temperament, sociability, persistence at tasks and affordability (Edwards et al., 2011). As of 2010, all children entering New South Wales Department of Education schools have been required to participate in the Best Start Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (New South Wales Department of Education, 2018a). The assessment gathers data

about children's literacy and numeracy skills in the first five weeks of kindergarten, which is the first year of compulsory schooling. Evidence suggests this assessment is also considered by parents who have a choice when deciding whether to enrol their child at school (Blake, 2013). Typically, these decisions are made in consultation with the pre-school and/or school teachers.

The purpose of this brief, and somewhat generalised, overview of early childhood education and care in New South Wales is to establish the terrain of the research reported in this thesis. Key factors and events have been foregrounded to highlight some of the "practice traditions" and "subjectivities" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31) shaping the conditions found at, and brought to, the site of the study reported in this thesis. In the following section the scope of the study is narrowed and the niche within the terrain under investigation – namely cross-sectorial professional perspectives of transitions between the two worlds – is identified.

Establishing a niche in the terrain: When two worlds collide

The importance of making a positive start to school has been the focus of international attention for decades. However, much of the literature pays attention to discontinuities between early childhood education and normative assumptions of what it means to be ready for school. International attention to and investment in early childhood education supports the premise that "the first years of life lay the foundations for an individual's future skills development and learning" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017, p. 3). However, in many Australian states, including New South Wales, the point of transition is also the point where education and care systems are split. Challenges associated with split systems include, but are not limited to, discontinuities associated with different governance, funding, administration, curriculum and pedagogy (Moss, 2013).

At the time this study commenced, there was very little empirical research investigating cross-sectorial professional perspectives of transitions to school practices. Similarly, there was little in the extant literature that discussed transitions as continuities. However, during the lifetime of this doctoral journey, both of these gaps have received attention from scholars within the field. Of note,

the fifth *Starting Strong* report (OECD, 2017) emphasized three recent shifts in the way transitions to school are understood. First, the report acknowledged that transitioning to school is not a universal event or point in time, and transitions are identified as complex, unique and multi-faceted experiences. In this thesis, the term ‘transitions’ (plural) is used to identify the multiple crossings (back and forth) that children, their families and others make over an extended period of time to and from different destinations between the two worlds. Second, the report highlighted the imperative to ensure the benefits gained by participating in high quality early childhood education are not diminished when children enter the school system. Shifting attention from normative constructions of readiness, this imperative emphasised the role cross-sectorial collaborations play in establishing continuity of learning and development. Third, recognition that the contexts (sites) of transitions influence the practices possible represents a significant shift from universal one-size-fits-all approaches that fail to account for the diverse realities of children’s lived experiences. This recent shift toward considering transitions as continuities (Boyle, Grieshaber, & Petriwkyj, 2018; Boyle, Petriwskyj, & Grieshaber, 2018; Dockett & Perry, 2014a; Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017; Lillejord, Borte, Halvorsrud, Ruud, & Freyr, 2017; OECD, 2017) harnesses sectorial differences by reframing them as opportunities to “build on what has gone before” (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017, p. 133). The research reported in this thesis adds to this emerging body of literature.

In 2013, the year the evidence presented in this thesis was gathered, 85% of children at the Long Day Care centre – which is the focus of this study – transitioned to the co-located primary school. However, prior to the commencement of the study, interaction between the two settings was limited and functional. Transitions practices were directed by the school’s enrolment policy and there was little evidence of shared understandings of each other’s world, or of a shared language of transitions. Sharing information, a vital element for building on what has gone before, was limited to the ‘school readiness’ checklist designed by the school. The use of positional language (e.g., “going up to big school”) also suggested practice traditions associated with power and status were active within the site. On a personal and professional level, the conundrum of cross-sectorial

continuity first emerged through my work as a kindergarten teacher in primary schools in New South Wales. Having trained as an infant's teacher (for children aged 3 to 8 years), my knowledge and understanding of pre-compulsory and compulsory school philosophies and approaches had not been blurred by sectorial boundaries. Witnessing children entering the school system as *tabulae rasae* piqued my interest in and concern about the nature of systemic splits. More recently when working as a teacher educator in a Bachelor of Early Childhood/Primary pre-service teacher education program, this conundrum resurfaced as colleagues and students seemed unusually challenged by the concept of cross-sectorial continuity, particularly in relation to teacher practices. As early childhood professionals' understandings of education and care are influenced by their own experience of the sector in which they work (Tanase & Wang, 2010), investigating cross-sectorial understandings of transitions practices emerged as an area of interest and concern.

Occupying a niche in the terrain: Transitions as continuity

The aim of this research was to investigate how transitions to school might be enhanced by developing deeper professional relationships and shared understandings between teachers from both sectors. Employing a critical participatory action research approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, 2003; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014), the study addresses the question: 'How might establishing shared understandings of practices enhance continuity during transitions to school?'

The theoretical framework and the approach (methodology) employed in the study are inextricably entwined and thus constitute a "theory-method package" (Nicolini, 2012, p. 216). This "package" draws on three theoretical (theory of communicative action; site ontologies; and theory of practice architectures) and two methodological elements (participatory action research; and critical participatory action research) elements. Critical theory, specifically the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987), provides a framework for interpreting and reporting how the conditions for ideal speech – afforded by the opening of a communicative space – work to facilitate the negotiation of intersubjective agreement in order to establish shared understandings and reach unforced consensus about what to do in a particular situation (Habermas, 1984, 1987).

Site ontologies (Schatzki, 2002, 2003, 2012) offer insights into the way intersubjectivity is prefigured by an understanding of practices as inherently the “site of the social” (Schatzki, 2002, p. xi). Practices, according to Schatzki (2002), are made up of “open-ended spatially-temporally dispersed nexus[es] of doings and sayings” (p. 14). The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer, & Bristol, 2014) extends Schatzki’s notion of what constitutes a practice to include a third element (relatings) to account for the ways practices are enabled and constrained by social and political conditions found at or brought to the site (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, 2003) acknowledges that participants come to the study with concerns and a commitment to transform practices based on critical views of current practice. Extending this approach, critical participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014) emphasises the capacity of communicative spaces to establish shared understandings of practices and the conditions in which they are enacted. Together these elements formed the theoretical and analytical lenses employed in the iterative process of “zooming in and out” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 219) to provide the evidence gathered throughout the study.

A site ontological approach is based on the premise that practices are inherently connected to the context in which they take place (Schatzki, 2003). The physical site of the study accommodates a Long Day Care (LDC) centre and a primary school. Prior to the commencement of the Building Bridges Professional Learning Community (BBPLC), interactions between the school and the LDC centre had been infrequent. The participants of the study included four teachers: two from the pre-school room in the LDC centre and one from each of the two kindergarten classes in the primary school. Four executive staff also agreed to participate, including the Director of the LDC centre, the Principal and Assistant Principal of the primary school, and the Assistant Director of the Education Services team. Consistent with the theory-method package employed (see Chapter 3), evidence was gathered and analysed throughout all four cycles of the study. All of the conversations captured through this iterative process were transcribed and participants verified the accuracy of

transcriptions. Chapters 5 – 7 provide detailed accounts of the analysis undertaken to present the findings of the study as relational, policy and practical continuity.

In summary, this thesis applies a critical lens to transitions to school practices within a communicative space (Habermas, 1984, 1987) at a particular site (Schatzki, 2002, 2003, 2012) by interrogating the arrangements (practice architectures) that enable and constrain them (Kemmis et al., 2017) in order to transform understandings of the practice, the conduct of the practice and the conditions under which the practice is enacted (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014)

Significance of the study

This study documents the actions undertaken by a cross-sectorial group of early childhood and primary school professionals investigating how or if the negotiation of shared understandings of practices might enhance continuity during transitions to school. This research is significant for a number of reasons, including but not limited to the following contributions it makes to the field.

The study:

1. pays attention to the ways cross-sectorial professional relationships can work to enable and constrain continuity during transitions to school. In particular, it draws attention to the absence of shared understandings of practices/policies across the sectors, and to the capacity mutually respectful professional collaborations have to establish these understandings. If continuity is understood as “building on what has gone before” (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017, p. 133) a shared understanding of transitions practices across the sectors is critical.
2. adopts a new theoretical perspective to address a persistently problematic and important issue. By employing a site-based ontological perspective, the study offers fresh insights into ways transitions to school are understood within the field. By reframing transitions as continuity practices, the study establishes new ground from which to conceptualise transitions practices, policies and further research.
3. sheds light on the ways site-based cross-sectorial critical approaches to establishing shared understandings of practices and policies can be enacted to enhance continuity of learning,

development and wellbeing. As such, the study makes a methodological contribution to the field.

4. adds to an emerging body of literature that shifts the focus of transitions to school from the deficit notion of discontinuity to educational provision for continuities.

Structure of the thesis

Table 1.1 provides an overview of the structure of the thesis by publication, identifying the chapters (2, 5, 6, 7 & 8) that include publications.

Table 1.1

Thesis structure

Chapter	Title
Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Literature review – includes Article A
Chapter 3	Theory-method package
Chapter 4	The BBPLC
Chapter 5	Relational continuity – includes Article B
Chapter 6	Policy continuity – includes Article C
Chapter 7	Practical continuity – includes Article D
Chapter 8	Reframing transitions – includes Article E

Table 1.2 supplements this information by providing additional detailed information about the publications.

Table 1.2

Publications

Article	Publication
Article A	Boyle, T., Grieshaber, S. & Petriwskyj, A. (2018). An integrative review of transitions to school literature. <i>Educational Research Review</i> 24, 170 – 180. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.05.001 2017 Scopus metrics: CiteScore 6.05; SNIP 4.067; SJR 2.963
Article B	Boyle, T., & Petriwskyj, A. (2014). Transitions to school: Reframing professional relationships. <i>Early Years: An International Research Journal</i> , 34(4), 392 – 404 . doi:10.1080/09575146.2014.953042 2017 Scopus metrics: CiteScore 1.10; SNIP 1.136; SJR 0.843
Article C	Boyle, T. & Grieshaber, S. (2017). Linking learning: Developing cross-sector policies for transitions to school. In R. Maclean (Ed.), <i>Life in classrooms: Past, present and future</i> (pp. 369 – 384). Singapore: Springer.
Article D	Boyle, T. & Wilkinson, J. (2018). Two worlds, one site: Leading practices and transitions to school. <i>Journal of Leadership in Educational Administration and History</i> , 50(4), 325 – 342. doi:10.1080/00220620.2018.1510384 2017 Scopus metrics: CiteScore 0.77; SNIP 0.595; SJR 0.353
Article E	Boyle, T., Petriwskyj, A. & Grieshaber, S. (2018). Reframing transitions to school as continuity practices: The role of practice architectures. <i>Australian Educational Researcher</i> , 45(4), 419 – 434. doi: 10.1007/s1334-018-0272-01. 2017 Scopus metrics: CiteScore 1.26; SNIP 0.965; SJR 0.675

This chapter has given an overview of the background and significance of the research. Chapter 2 includes Article A, which presents an integrative review of transitions literature published between 2000 and 2015. Chapter 3 outlines the theory-method package employed to generate,

gather and interpret the evidence. Chapter 4 presents information that might traditionally be identified as the research design and/or methodology. In this thesis, the practice landscape of the study is foregrounded to exemplify the nexus between practices and the sites in which they are enacted. The following three chapters (all published articles preceded by framing texts) present an analysis of evidence, findings and discussion surrounding the three constructions of transitions continuity identified in the literature review. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the ways cross-sectorial professional relationships can work to establish shared understandings and enhance relational continuity during transitions to school. Chapter 6 presents an analysis of cross-sectorial practices associated with the development of transition statements. Findings suggest that co-constructed policies have the capacity to enhance continuity by establishing shared understandings of, and language about, what has gone before and what comes next. Chapter 7 presents an analysis of the ways leading practices can work to establish shared understandings of transitions practices and enhance practical continuity. A synthesis of the research findings that employed an ontological lens to reframe transitions as continuity practices is presented in Chapter 8. Finally, Chapter 9 presents an overview of the contributions the study makes to the field, and suggests some further implications for policies, practices and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of transitions to school literature published between 2000 and 2015. An integrative review methodology was chosen primarily for its capacity to provide a panoramic view of the complexities associated with the topic. The article was developed in response to the author's quest to find a new way to examine the vast and expanding corpus of transitions to school literature. At the time, ten extant reviews of the topic were located, yet six of these did not specify or provide details of the methodologies employed. The absence of explicit rigorous methodological statements – and the predominance of reviews written for targeted audiences – indicated a gap in the extant corpus. This gap subsequently informed the methodology, purpose and design of this review. Adapting the integrative review scaffold developed by Torraco (2005), the review presents and explicates a six-step review process. In the final step the authors synthesise the findings of the review and present possibilities (new directions) for reframing transitions to school as continuities. Drawing together a range of continuities identified within the extant literature, the review recommends further research be undertaken to formulate new understandings of transitions to school practices associated with and informed by relational, policy and practical continuities. Following this recommendation, the findings of the research presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 report empirical evidence of these reframed constructions of continuity.

The literature reviewed in this chapter has also been disseminated at the following conferences:

Boyle, T., Grieshaber, S. & Petriwskyj, A. (2016, September). *An integrative review of transitions to school literature*. Paper presented at the European Early Childhood Educational Research Association (EECERA) Conference, Dublin, Ireland.

Boyle, T., Grieshaber, S. & Petriwskyj, A. (2015, November). *An integrative review of transitions to school literature*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference. Perth, Australia.

Article A

Boyle, T., Grieshaber, S. & Petriwskyj, A. (2018). An integrative review of transitions to school literature. *Educational Research Review* 24, 170 – 180. doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.05.001

2017 Scopus metrics: CiteScore 6.05; SNIP 4.067; SJR 2.963

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An integrative review of transitions to school literature²

Abstract

An integrative literature review critiques and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in order to reveal new perspectives. An analysis of extant reviews (2002 – 2013) of transitions to school literature led to the identification of four theoretical perspectives of transitions: developmental, ecological, socio-cultural, and critical; and six recurrent concepts across these perspectives. These perspectives and concepts were used to develop the conceptual framework for the integrative review of transitions literature published between 2000 – 2015. Subsequent to the critique and analysis processes required by an integrative literature review, the findings revealed three significant shifts across this period of time: i) ecological and socio-cultural perspectives and relationships concepts now influence concepts of transitions more strongly than developmental perspectives and readiness concepts, ii) an evolving representation of critical perspectives that offers new insights into socially just approaches to transitions to school, and (iii) the emergence of the concept of continuity. Finally, the paper reports new perspectives of transitions to school that seek to address persistent concerns of (dis) continuity within the literature. By reframing the review findings as relational, practical and policy continuity, the paper concludes by suggesting ways these concepts could be applied to innovative approaches to and research about transitions to school.

Keywords: transitions to school; integrative literature review; multi-theoretical perspectives; continuity

1. Introduction

This paper presents an integrative review of transitions to school literature published between 2000 and 2015. Unlike other review methodologies (e.g., systematic, theoretical, thematic) an Integrative Review (IR) adopts a comprehensive methodology that encompasses a range of

² Text is consistent with the journal guidelines: APA 6 reference style and US spelling.

approaches and theoretical frameworks, and so has the capacity to provide a panoramic perspective of complexities associated with a topic. The panoramic lens of this IR aims to reveal shifts in thinking and generate insights into persistent concerns and conflicting approaches to children transitioning to school. As there is little procedural advice regarding this methodology, we have drawn on the work of Torraco (2005) to develop a six-step framework for the IR process. These six steps have also been used to inform the structure of the paper and are explained in what follows, beginning with Step 1.

2. Identify the topic and justify the need for the integrative review (step 1)

Global interest and investment in making a strong start to formal schooling is reflected in the enduring and expanding corpus of literature associated with the topic of transitioning to school. The extant literature associated with this topic reports and reflects the development of knowledge from a range of historical, cultural, social, economic and theoretical perspectives over a sustained period of time and therefore can be classified as a “mature topic” (Torraco, 2005, p. 357). Inherently, mature topics encompass an array of philosophical standpoints and contexts, resulting in an equally diverse array of key terms and definitions. In this review, the term ‘transitions to school’ has been used to identify the topic and acknowledge the complex range of transitions activated as children move from pre-compulsory to compulsory school sectors. The parameters of the topic (field) have been set to include literature published between 2000 and 2015, providing an extended timeframe to identify shifts in the field.

An initial search and analysis of extant reviews of transitions to school literature was undertaken to satisfy the requirement for an IR to make “a contribution to the discipline and its constituents” (Torraco, 2005, p. 358). The search located ten extant reviews published between 2002 and 2013. These reviews were analysed using the following criteria: a) review methodology (2.1), b) theoretical perspectives (2.2), and c) recurrent concepts (2.3). Criteria a) and b) were identified by searching the documents for specific mention of a review methodology and/or theoretical framework; and c) was identified using thematic coding (Gibbs, 2007). The summarized

data were then synthesized to identify gaps in the extant reviews (2002-2013), justify the need for further review, and inform the development of a conceptual structure for the IR.

2.1 Methodologies identified in the extant reviews

Of the ten extant reviews (2002-2013), three (McTurk, Nutton, Lea, Robinson, & Carapetis, 2008; Peters, 2010a; Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Tayler, 2005) stated that a systematic approach was used but this methodology was not clearly detailed. In contrast, one review (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood [CEIEC], 2008) employed a modified best evidence methodology and explained the process. The remaining six reviews (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2013a; Hirst, Jervis, Sojo, & Cavanagh, 2011; Skouteris, Watson, & Lum, 2012; Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008; Yeboah, 2002) identified the literature search procedure but not a specific review methodology. The lack of explicit methodological statements revealed a gap in procedure and informed the development of the structured approach for the proposed IR. No IRs were identified, suggesting the potential for an integrative approach to make a contribution to the field.

2.2 Theoretical perspectives identified in the extant reviews

Four major theoretical perspectives were evidenced in the extant reviews: developmental, ecological, socio-cultural and critical (see 3.1 for definitions). The earliest extant review (Yeboah, 2002) identified the prevalence of developmental perspectives, however, seven subsequent reviews revealed that ecological and/or bioecological perspectives were more prevalent. Peters (2010a) used socio-cultural perspectives and Vogler et al. (2008) adopted developmental, ecological and socio-cultural perspectives to critique transitions to school concepts and practices. More recent critical perspectives were not named, yet two reviews (Petriwskyj et al., 2005; Vogler et al., 2008) took a critical stance. The presence of a range of theoretical perspectives across the extant reviews suggests that a review that integrates multiple theoretical perspectives is warranted.

2.3 Recurrent concepts identified in the extant reviews

Thematic coding (Gibbs, 2007) of the extant reviews (2002-2013) revealed six recurrent

concepts: *readiness, relationships, transitions activities, pedagogy, power, and policy*.

The majority of items reviewed by Dockett and Perry (2013a) addressed the concept *readiness*, yet two constructions of readiness were evident across the ten reviews. The first is informed by the premise that children can be made ‘more ready’ to start school by acquiring specific skills and dispositions (Yeboah, 2002). The second suggests readiness is influenced by contextual and relational factors. Positive *relationships*, often described as collaborations among stakeholders (Hirst et al., 2011) were critical to ‘successful’ transitions (Yeboah, 2002). Reciprocal communication with families (Petriwskyj et al., 2005) and across systems (Dockett & Perry, 2013a) had the capacity to permeate other key contributors for successful transitions (Peters, 2010a; McTurk et al., 2008). *Transitions activities* included practices designed to familiarise and inform children and families about starting formal schooling in order to bridge the gap between the sectors (Vogler et al., 2008). These can be short-term orientation events (Petriwskyj et al., 2005) or long-term transitions programs involving a range of stakeholders (CEIEC, 2008). Earlier reviews (Yeboah, 2002; Baker-Bohan & Little, 2002) identified differences in *pedagogy* across early years sectors as problematic. The analysis suggests that pedagogical continuity is being re-framed from expectations of seamlessness (mirror images) across the sectors to anticipation of inevitable differences (Dockett & Perry, 2013a). McTurk et al. (2008) and Peters (2010a) noted the need for culturally inclusive pedagogies. *Power* is discussed in relation to the capacity of effective transitions practices to empower participants (Hirst et al., 2011) by involving stakeholders, particularly children as partners (Dockett & Perry, 2013a). Institutions, predominantly schools (CEIEC, 2008), have the capacity to render stakeholders more or less powerful (Dockett & Perry, 2013a). Establishing stronger *policy* links among stakeholders (Yeboah, 2002) and across systems (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002) is recommended if prior and concurrent experiences of transitions are to be valued and acknowledged (Peters, 2010a). Differences in policies guiding pedagogy and curriculum across the sectors were identified as a source of discontinuity (Skouteris et al., 2012). All of the extant reviews provided commentary about these recurrent concepts primarily from mono

theoretical perspectives, indicating a gap in the field. Applying multiple theoretical perspectives to interrogate these recurrent concepts and provide a panoramic view of shifts in the field justified the need for the IR.

3. Establish a conceptual structure for the integrative review (step 2)

According to Torraco (2005), “conceptual structuring of the topic requires the author to adopt a guiding theory, model or point of view about the topic” (p. 359). Responding to the gaps identified in Step 1, the conceptual structure for this IR employs two analytical devices, *theoretical perspectives* (3.1) and *recurrent concepts* (3.2) to review, critique and reconceptualise the mature and expanding corpus of transitions literature.

3.1 Theoretical perspectives

The theoretical perspectives identified in the analysis of the 10 extant reviews (*developmental, ecological, socio-cultural, and critical*) have been used to categorize perspectives in the IR. As there are inconsistencies in the application of theories across the transitions literature, the following definitions are offered in full acknowledgement that alternative interpretations exist. *Developmental* perspectives espouse a view of childhood as a period of natural, universal growth and maturation - a state of becoming (Vogler et al., 2008). Developmental perspectives of transitions to school reflect hierarchical progressions through stages associated with chronological age (Piaget, 1964), and developmental features or adaptations such as temperament and adjustment (Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006; Margetts, 2007). Whilst adults may prompt or nurture maturation, progression through stages is portrayed as an individual change experience (Crain, 2011). The term *ecological* applies to theoretical perspectives informed by ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). According to this theoretical perspective children develop within a complex system of multi-layered relationships that influence their life experience (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Transitions are explained as negotiated interactions among the ecologies of the systems. Ecological models of transitions (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007) offer a platform for interdisciplinary collaborations across systems

and attend to children's broader transitional contexts. The term *socio-cultural* is used to categorize an array of perspectives, including socio-cultural approaches and the sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2011; Prout & James, 1990), that reflect the way historical, social and cultural contexts influence how children construct meaning within their world. Socio-cultural perspectives represent a significant shift from conceptions of "children as human becomings" to more inclusive and agentic perceptions of children as "human beings" (Vogler et al., 2008, p. 6). Socio-cultural perspectives of transitions are informed by Vygotsky's (1935) view that development (change) occurs as a result of children actively participating in actions that are mediated by their social, cultural and historical world. Rogoff (2003) and Corsaro (2011) extended this view to highlight the dynamic nature of relationships among people, places and time. The term *critical* is used to categorize theoretical perspectives that seek to understand difference and inequity. Influenced by Habermas (1984; 1987) and later Friere (1970), McLaren (2007) and Giroux (2011), critical theories reassess the relationship between theory and practice by critiquing the conditions of practices (Carr & Kemmis, 1988). Critical perspectives of transitions seek to reframe normative assumptions and ideas (e.g., readiness) to more inclusive considerations of participation (Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011).

3.2 Recurrent concepts

Key concepts of transitions to school (*readiness, relationships, transitions activities, pedagogy, power and policy*) identified in the 10 extant reviews framed analysis in the IR. International variance in use of the term *readiness* is an indication of the multifarious and conflicting application of the term in the literature. In this review, it is taken to mean the assessment (formal and informal) of children's preparedness to commence compulsory schooling (McTurk et al., 2008). This category was applied in this review when first, the term was used explicitly by the author/s; and, second, when it was associated with the process of children commencing school. In transitions literature, the term *relationships* is used to describe the interactions among and between key stakeholders, and these include but are not limited to children, families, teachers, and the wider

community. During transitions to school, relationships can be unidirectional (transactional), bi-directional/multi-directional (reciprocal) or as Skouteris et al. (2012) noted, absent. *Transitions activities* are defined as actions implemented to orientate and/or induct children and their families into the school environment. The terms ‘transitions’ and ‘orientations’ are commonly used to describe these programs or priming events (Corsaro, Molinari, & Rosier, 2002). Any activities named or identified that sought to establish links between transitions settings qualified the item for inclusion. *Pedagogy* is defined as “early childhood educators’ professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships, curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning” (Commonwealth of Australia [COA], 2009, p. 9). Any discussion of educators’ practices, including commentary on philosophical and pedagogical differences across the pre-compulsory and compulsory school sectors, qualified the item for inclusion. *Power* is acknowledged as being a contested concept, however for the purposes of this review a two-fold definition is used. First, as power-over, which means the ability or right to control people and things such as resources and events; and second, as power-to, which relates to the potential individuals, groups or practices have to generate cooperative consensual collaborations. Items included in the first definition were located using the term power, or associated terms such as status, control, and hierarchy. Items included in the second understanding of power related to equity. *Policy* is defined as “a process and a product” (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997, p. 24) and as “both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended” (Ball, 1994, p. 10). Therefore, items that cited policy documents, discussed particular transitions processes or courses of action, or noted the absence of policy guidance or support were included in this category.

4. Search and retrieve appropriate literature (step 3)

As “literature is the data of an integrative review” (Torraco, 2005, p. 360) searching for and retrieving appropriate literature followed a rigorous and replicable protocol. With this in mind the keywords “transition* to school” (abstract) and “early years*” (anywhere) were used to search the EBSCOHOST (82 items identified), PROQUEST (115 items identified) and INFORMIT (27 items

identified) databases. Additional criteria for the search included date of publication (2000-2015), referee status (peer-reviewed), format (journals, books, book chapters), and language (English).

Table 2.1

Process undertaken to retain, discard or extend the body of literature

Criteria	Consequence
Duplication	Discarded items duplicated across databases
Relevance	Discarded items related to other transitions e.g., to high school
Education specific	Discarded science / health items Discarded items related to readiness only \neq transitions
Peer reviewed	Only peer reviewed items were retained Reports and policy documents were discarded
Citations	Extended by reviewing reference lists of all items included
Evidence based	Discarded items not reporting or discussing empirical studies
Edited texts	Extended by adding individual chapters in peer reviewed edited collections

The criteria (Table 2.1) to retain, discard or extend items were negotiated among the authors. In applying these criteria, the final list containing 230 items was saved as an EndNote TM library. These items included research reports, discussion papers or chapters, theoretical material and discussion on transitions within curriculum areas (references cited in the following sections are illustrative rather than exhaustive).

5. Analyse the literature (step 4)

Following the establishment of the body of literature to be reviewed, a three-phase analysis process was undertaken. In Phase 1 the conceptual structure was used to construct an analytical device that Webster and Watson (2005) call a “concept matrix” (p. xvii) (5.1). The second phase employed visual summaries (5.2) to compare the representation of theories and concepts within the data set and across time. In the final phase the analysis was extended by constructing thematic summaries of multi-theoretical perspectives of the recurrent concepts (5.3).

5.1 The concept matrix (analysis phase 1)

The process began by following recommendations from Torraco (2005) that analysis “often requires the author to first deconstruct a topic into its basic elements” (p. 361). According to Webster and Watson (2002), high quality literature reviews are concept-centric rather than author-centric, and a conceptual organisational framework such as a concept matrix should be used to structure the review. The concept matrix lists the articles by year (most recent first) and author (alphabetically) on the vertical axis, with recurrent concepts and theoretical perspectives listed across the horizontal axis. The author list corresponds with the full bibliographic details of literature reviewed (see Appendix A). The matrix was set up as an Excel™ spreadsheet so that frequency counts and data searches could be easily achieved. A text search of each item listed in the matrix was undertaken to identify theoretical perspectives, and if not named specifically (and most were) an electronic search of the document was undertaken using key terms (i.e., theory labels and theorists’ names). Once identified a cross was added to the appropriate column on the matrix. Recurrent concepts were also identified using a text search of key terms. Items in the final matrix were cross-referenced by the authors and where necessary, consensus reached on the coding and inclusion of questioned items. However, the size and format of the matrix made it difficult to identify shifts within and across the elements, thus prompting the development of a strategy for the second phase of analysis.

5.2 Visual summaries (analysis phase 2)

As some evidence may not have been revealed through the matrix process, Excel™ graphing tools were used to compare the representation of theories and concepts within the data overall (2000-2015) and across time (2000-2005, 2006-2010, 2011-2015) as visual summaries (Appendix B). This strategy is consistent with the advice provided by Webster and Watson (2002) who recommend isolating concepts by units of analysis to provide a “crisper view” (p. xvii) of the data. Three outcomes of this analysis appear to contradict dominant discourses and assumptions about the topic. Visual Summary 1 (VS1 Appendix B) shows that developmental perspectives are not

dominant in the transitions literature reviewed. From 2011 to 2015, there was a markedly greater increase in attention to other perspectives than to developmental perspectives. Visual Summary 2 (VS2 Appendix B) shows the concept ‘relationships’ ranked first and ‘readiness’ fourth of the six concepts identified, challenging extant review findings in which readiness dominated (Dockett & Perry, 2013a). Visual Summaries 4 to 6 (VS4-6 Appendix B) reveal shifts in the way the concepts have been represented across time and an incremental rise in the volume of literature. The 38 sources published between 2000 and 2005 are dominated by ecological perspectives of relationships and transitions activities (see VS4), reflecting the theme of the first *Starting Strong* report (OECD, 2001) related to ‘strong and equal partnerships’. In the 67 sources published between 2006 and 2010 increased attention to other concepts, particularly policy and pedagogy (see VS5) was noted, reflecting key themes from *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006). The 117 sources identified between 2011 and 2015 represent a significant increase in the volume of literature (see VS4,5,6). Whilst ecological perspectives and relationships concepts remained dominant, the distribution of concepts across perspectives was generally more even. Decreased attention to transition activities alongside increased attention to other concepts such as policy and pedagogy indicates an awareness of the complexity of transitions. Attention to power from 2010 onwards in all but developmental perspectives suggests the increasing presence of critical discourses (see VS6). Deeper analysis to illuminate these key changes was warranted.

5.3 Multi theoretical perspectives of recurrent concepts (analysis phase 3)

In keeping with Torraco’s (2005) guidance, analysis “... allows the author to reconstruct, conceptually, the topic for clearer understanding of it and to assess how it is represented in the literature” (p. 362). In Phase 3 the literature was analysed again to identify how the theoretical perspectives (developmental, ecological, socio-cultural, critical) represented the six recurrent concepts (relationships, readiness, transitions activities, pedagogy, power, policy). Returning to the matrix, subsets of data were created by filtering the spreadsheet by concept (e.g., readiness) and theoretical perspective (e.g., critical). Portable document files (PDFs) of the literature identified

within each subset were then imported into NVivo™ to conduct text/word frequency searches, and generate reports. Regular cross checking against excerpts and sometimes whole documents was undertaken to ensure faithfulness to the content of the literature. These reports were then used to code the data, identify common themes and construct the concept tables (Appendix C). These tables and accompanying thematic analysis synthesize the extensive body of literature reviewed and provide a new representation of the topic in the form of a multi-theoretical analysis of the six recurrent concepts. Each recurrent concept is discussed in order of prevalence within the literature.

5.3.1. Relationships

In this IR, ‘relationships’ was the most frequently noted recurrent concept, representing 26.14% of the concepts identified (Appendix B: VS2). As shown in Table 2.1 (Appendix C), three relationship themes persisted across the theoretical perspectives, these were: *nature*, *characteristics* and *conditions*. Developmental perspectives discussed the *nature* of relationships, particularly peer relationships, in terms of their contribution to children’s adjustment during transitions to school (Ladd, et al., 2006; Yeo & Clarke, 2006). Ecological perspectives emphasized the contextual nature of relationships (Ahtola et al., 2015; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Einarsdottir, 2011) forming a transition ‘bridge’ that Huser, Dockett and Perry (2015) argued is bidirectional. Socio-cultural perspectives stressed the dynamic, complex interactional nature of relationships formed and sustained as children start school (Crafter & Maunder, 2012; Fluckiger, 2010; Huf, 2013). Critical perspectives considered the professional nature of relationships, advocating negotiation of the conditions upon which relationships are formed during transitions (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014). Henderson (2012) argued that differences should act as a force across relationships rather than operating in just one direction. Ecological and socio-cultural perspectives identified the value of relational continuity offered by peers and families (Peters, 2014).

Characteristics of relationships were coupled with the *conditions* in which they were composed, so these two themes are presented concurrently. Developmental perspectives linked positive relationships with engagement, defined as children’s participation in planned activities and

cooperation with peers and adults (Robinson & Diamond, 2014); and negative relationships with children's disengagement and poor adjustment to school (Ladd et al., 2006). Ecological perspectives profiled collaboration as a characteristic of supportive relationships (Dockett & Perry, 2008; Miller, 2015), or argued that respectful relationships are sustained by mediating conditions of communication (Hopps, 2014; Noel, 2011; Peters, 2014). Socio-cultural perspectives proposed interpersonal skills as key characteristics of relationships, with Ebbeck, Saidon, Rajalachime and Teo (2013) noting reciprocity and accommodating power differences as enabling conditions. Critical perspectives characterized transitions relationships as steeped in power differentials (Henderson, 2012; Petriwskyj, 2014a), suggesting that new conditions for the facilitation of emancipatory actions were needed (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014). In summary, positive relationships were identified as an integral component of successful transitions (Ahtola et al., 2015; Einarsdottir, 2011; Perry, 2014). The unidirectional and causal nature of transitions relationships in developmental perspectives shifted to more reciprocal understandings in other theoretical perspectives.

5.3.2. *Transitions activities and policy*

Initial analysis of the recurrent concepts *transitions activities* and *policy* showed less change from earlier reviews and less distinction between theoretical perspectives than for other recurrent concepts, indicating that further extensive analysis was not warranted. *Transitions activities*, representing 18.91% of the concepts identified (Appendix B: VS2), tended to be preparatory or orienting in function, with differences between developmental and other perspectives in the range and length of time across the activities that were offered and their goal. The prevalence of short-term or one-off school orientation events in developmental perspectives (Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn, 2010) broadened in socio-cultural and critical perspectives to collaborative events that stretched across several months before and after school entry (Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters, & Carr, 2012; Petriwskyj, 2013). The goal shifted from school adjustment (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008) to continuity of experience (Einarsdottir, Perry &

Dockett, 2008). *Policy*, representing 17.73% of the concepts identified (Appendix B: VS2), appeared most commonly as products in the form of sector or context specific documents focussed on preparation for school and continuity of learning. There were differences between developmental and other perspectives of policy, which were evident in a shift from policy as product in the form of universal structural policies (McLachlan, 2008), toward more nuanced process orientated policies that addressed community disadvantage and educational inequity (Dockett & Perry, 2013b; Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Tayler, 2014; Podmore, Sauvao, & Mapa, 2003).

5.3.3. *Readiness*

In this review readiness concepts accounted for 14.48% of the total concepts identified (Appendix B: VS2). The persistence of ‘readiness’, framed as children’s preparedness to commence compulsory schooling, was challenged by alternate views about the readiness of schools and communities. As shown in Table 2.3 (Appendix C), three themes (*assessment*, *programs* and *communication*) were identified across the theoretical perspectives attending to concepts of readiness. Developmental perspectives considered readiness *assessment* of individual children, including competency-based assessments and checklists (Margetts, 2013; Yeo & Clarke, 2006). Ecological perspectives shifted readiness responsibility from the individual child to the systems that support children transitioning to school (Ahtola et al., 2011). Dockett and Perry (2009) noted that ecological factors (family, school, community) interact to form dispositions and provide a more contextually relevant assessment. Socio-cultural perspectives extended this notion by suggesting that assessment should attend more broadly to the influence of intrapersonal, interpersonal and community factors on children’s transitions (Ebbeck et al., 2013). Critical perspectives contested normative assessments that rendered children from minority groups as ‘at risk’ and set up expectations of problematic educational trajectories (Henderson, 2013; Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011).

The aim of readiness *programs* informed by developmental perspectives was improvement in children’s capacity to commence school (Burchinal et al., 2010; Janus, 2011a). Ecological and

socio-cultural perspectives broadened the sphere of influence to the community (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2015; Emfinger, 2012) and supported long-term community-wide programs (Bell-Booth, Staton & Thorpe, 2014; Dockett & Perry, 2007). Interdisciplinary programs informed by socio-cultural perspectives respected the views of minority groups and the role of professionals, typically from the health and welfare sectors, in supporting transitions to school (New, Guilfoyle & Harman, 2015; Sarja et al., 2012). In contrast, critical perspectives took the view that readiness programs were problematic, political, and conflated readiness and transitions (Dockett, 2014). Programs that established binaries rendering children ‘ready or not’ were critiqued for the deficit approach they ascribed and the hegemonic norms they perpetuated (Graue & Reineke, 2014; Taylor, 2011).

In developmental perspectives, *communication* was uni-directional as information such as reports or checklists about individual children’s readiness was gathered and sent to the school (Ladd et al., 2006). Ecological perspectives indicated that communication across the sectors was infrequent (Brostrom, 2003; Hopps, 2014), and that enhanced bi-directional communication would support sharing information about prior learning and enhance continuity (Ebbeck et al., 2013; Noel, 2011). Socio-cultural perspectives advocated multi-directional communication to improve collaboration during transitions to school (Emfinger, 2012). From a critical perspective, the persistence of culturally biased homogeneous norms, communicated as expectations of the school-ready child, devalued family insights into children’s strengths and influenced narrow hegemonic approaches to transitions (Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011; Taylor, 2011).

5.3.4. *Pedagogy*

In this review pedagogy concepts accounted for 13.74% of the total concepts identified (Appendix B: VS2). As shown in Table 2.4 (Appendix C) three themes of pedagogy emerged across the theoretical perspectives: *(dis)continuity*, *approaches* and *understandings*. Pedagogy was highlighted in ecological and critical perspectives, but its explicit discussion within developmental and socio-cultural perspectives was limited. *Continuity* as a contributor to transitions has been defined as “coherence of experience” (Hopps, 2014, p. 406). The impact of (dis)continuity across

transitions to school was noted across all theoretical perspectives, yet there was a shift in focus between developmental and the other three perspectives from discontinuity for children to the role of teachers or sectors in addressing continuity. Although developmental perspectives were not strongly represented in this concept category, Grant (2013) identified different pedagogy across the compulsory and pre-compulsory sectors as being problematic due to the lack of cognitive continuity. Proponents of ecological and socio-cultural perspectives suggested that transitions would be more coherent if teachers worked toward establishing shared understandings of pedagogy (Chan, 2009) through collaborative dialogue (Ashton et al., 2008). Critical perspectives focused on the lack of alignment between sectorial policies informing pedagogy across the early years (Petriwskyj et al., 2014).

Strategies to manage sectorial differences in pedagogic *approach* varied from imposing greater similarity across sectors, to encouraging stakeholders to be more agentic in negotiating change. Developmental perspectives focused on preschool approaches that addressed preparation for school (Yeboah, 2002; Yeo & Clarke, 2006), but ecological and critical perspectives questioned the imposition of school pedagogies on preschools as a means of achieving continuity (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Hopps, 2014). Ecological approaches included pedagogic adjustment in both sectors to create smooth transitions (Timperley, McNaughton, Howie, & Robinson, 2003) as well as support for children negotiating change as they entered school (Mirkhil, 2010; White & Sharp, 2007). Socio-cultural approaches emphasized the role of relationships, particularly peer relationships, in mediating discontinuity by supporting children's sense of agency (Huf, 2013). Socio-cultural and critical perspectives considered home-school congruence and the cultural relevance of pedagogic approaches (Ashton et al., 2008; Taylor, 2011). Further, critical perspectives pointed to philosophical differences evident in policy and practice as a source of tension across the sectors, suggesting that deeper debate about pedagogic approaches is required (Henderson, 2014).

Responding to these tensions, proponents of ecological perspectives suggested that mutual *understandings* of pedagogical practices and influences on these practices (Dockett & Perry, 2012;

Peters, 2014) would enhance transitions experiences for all stakeholders (Chan, 2009). Critical perspectives focused on understanding the complexities of early years pedagogy (Alcock & Haggerty, 2013; Graue & Reineke, 2014), including pedagogical representation in policies across the sectors, and the influence of philosophical differences on pedagogical divergence (Petriwskyj, 2010). The influence of power in interactions between stakeholders emerged as a factor in addressing the challenge of shared understanding (Henderson, 2013; Petriwskyj, 2014b; Sarja et al., 2012).

5.3.5. *Power*

In this IR power concepts accounted for 9.01% of the total concepts identified (Appendix B: VS2). Analysis identified three recurrent themes with respect to power: *context, distribution and approach* (see Appendix C: Table 2.5). All theoretical perspectives located power within a contextual framework and noted an uneven distribution of power amongst stakeholders, yet differences were apparent between critical and other perspectives in the impact of power relations on transitions. Identification of this concept increased significantly between 2010 and 2015 (Appendix B: VS5; VS6) alongside an increased presence of critical perspectives within transitions to school literature (Appendix B: VS4; VS5; VS6). Developmental, ecological and socio-cultural perspectives suggested that external *contextual* factors - institutional influence, systemic or structural features and social situations – have power-over families or individuals (Crafter & Maunder, 2012; Griebel & Niesel, 2009). The predominance of external power indicated the influence of universal approaches and top-down systemic policies. In contrast, critical perspectives emphasized power-to generate transitions approaches in the locus of community contexts where relationships and identities are constructed and agency is recognized (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014; Dockett, 2014).

Distribution of power in favor of schools was attributed in developmental, ecological and socio-cultural perspectives to their supervisory and reporting functions (Griebel & Niesel, 2009), historical imbalances between home and school systems (Gill, Winters, & Freidman, 2006), and

hierarchical dominant discourses that might be disrupted when there were significant ideological differences (Ashton, et al, 2008). Critical perspectives noted instead the invisible barriers arising from covert actions such as labelling children (Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011) and from the internalization of subtle messages that impact transitions power relations (Henderson, 2012).

Approaches to power differed by perspective with respect to their locus and function.

Developmental and ecological perspectives focused on the power of interventions to promote the acquisition of readiness skills and behaviours (Margetts, 2007) or the predictive power of risk assessments that targeted community-level interventions (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). These external approaches shifted in critical and socio-cultural perspectives to shared agency and broader functions. For instance, socio-cultural perspectives considered the innovative power of partnerships such as the ‘Voices of Children’ project (Perry & Dockett, 2011) or collaborations in which power can be considered as both process and product (Sarja et al, 2012). Critical perspectives suggested that dialogic interactions and critical reflection were required to negotiate power differentials and shared understandings of transitions (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014; Henderson, 2013). Contrasts in notions of power emerged between perspectives in which the focus was power-over children’s successful transitions, and those in which attention turned to power-to generate more equitable transitions strategies. This change reflected a critique of reliance on universal solutions to transitions concerns and a shift in the locus of control away from schools towards shared responsibility for transitions.

In summary, this third phase of analysis illustrates the attention to ecological perspectives and relationships concepts identified in the Phase 2 Visual Summaries. However, it indicates two significant shifts: first, between developmental and other perspectives, and second, between earlier perspectives noted in the extant reviews (developmental, ecological) and more recent socio-cultural and critical perspectives. The first shift, from developmental to other perspectives was accompanied by increasing recognition of the complexity of influences on transitions and the range of stakeholder considerations. The second shift revealed that themes of power-to and equitable relationships were

limited in developmental perspectives (5.3.5), yet were prominent in critical perspectives. These shifts framed markedly different notions of transitions policy and practice, interactions between sectors, and the influence of a range of stakeholders. Although continuity was not initially identified as a key concept, it emerged as a permeating theme across literature from 2010-2015, linked to understandings of transitions to school (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Early, Pianta, Taylor & Cox, 2001; Hopps, 2014; Huf, 2013; Peters, 2014). Key differences emerged in constructions of continuity and in mechanisms to address discontinuity. The developmental perspective of continuity as making preschool more school-like (Yeo & Clarke, 2006) contrasted with socio-cultural and critical perspectives of continuity as engaging transitions capital, supportive relationships and children's agency in negotiating change as they enter school (Dunlop, 2007; Huf, 2013; Peters, 2014).

6. Critique the literature (step 5)

In this step, we draw on Torraco's (2005) ideas of critique as identifying "the strengths and key contributions of the literature...any deficiencies, omissions, inaccuracies and other problematic aspects of the literature...[and] any inconsistencies among published perspectives on the topic" (p. 362). To this end the critique focuses on inconsistencies, omissions and the emerging area of power, after briefly considering strengths. One strength is the amount of literature that focuses on transitions to school as it provides an ongoing and established basis for coherent analyses and critique, which can be used to inform further research. Another is that this body of literature has expanded to include a variety of theoretical perspectives since being informed in the extant reviews by mostly developmental and ecological perspectives. A third strength is the availability of a wide variety of research that can be used to inform policy decisions.

Inconsistencies are understood as contradictions or discrepancies amongst published perspectives on the topic (Torraco, 2005, p. 362). Three inconsistencies are discussed: the problematic nature of universal approaches to children transitioning to school; the limitations of the rigid nature of school expectations, and the presence/absence of children and families and their voices. First, in universal approaches such as those informed by developmental, and some versions

of ecological perspectives, western norms are used as the basis for decision making. This usually amounts to deficit approaches such as individual children being considered school ready or not according to how they are measured by developmental norms; and locating individual children at the centre of ecological models, which separates them system-wise from families and communities, and other social and cultural groups. Some ecologically informed literature has built on the idea of developmental deficit by suggesting that those children who might not be considered 'ready' using developmental benchmarks can be made 'more-ready'. Alternatively, critically informed theoretical perspectives challenge normative constructions of children, readiness, and transitions to school, suggesting that there are other ways to conceptualize children, families, communities, as well as other ways of knowing, learning and developing besides those informed by a one size fits all approach.

Second, the rigid nature of school expectations that are based on universal norms limits and in some cases, dismisses understandings of diversity (e.g., social, cultural, ethnic, economic, ability, inclusion, location etc.). This rigidity extends to expecting children to conform to normative understandings of child development and learning, and is often expressed by the unidirectional and causal nature of transitions relationships, which have uniform goals for children to cooperate and engage in adult-planned activities. Care is needed so that targeted interventions and readiness programs designed for specific sections of the population recognize capacity as culturally and contextually constructed, and do not position children and families as lacking. Critical theoretical perspectives demonstrate the problematic and contested nature of such comparative assumptions, and some socio-cultural approaches have questioned the ways in which specific populations such as migrant and refugee children and families have been positioned as lacking by universal approaches. Schools can offer more responsive, flexible, local and site-specific approaches to address transitions and diversity.

The third inconsistency is the absence/presence of children and families, and their voices. Developmental approaches can mute the voices of children by being adult centric and speaking for

and about children. They can also silence families because universal and unidirectional approaches position families as responsible for children being prepared for and oriented to schooling as directed by the school. Instead of expecting uniformity and conformity, approaches informed by socio-cultural and critical perspectives construct children as competent and agentic, and able to make informed decisions about their lives. Further, critical theoretical perspectives indicate the ethical and moral responsibilities of attending to children and their families, as does the rights perspective of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). When considered as part of relationships, children, families and communities can be understood as contributing positively to transitions to schooling as agentic and informed citizens.

In terms of omissions, we signal two points, the first being the conflation of readiness agendas with transitions to school, which we locate in the pressure for academic outcomes and accountability in the current climate of performativity and international comparison. Developmental and ecological perspectives have influenced policy and practice, exemplified by the creation of short-term orientation programs and multi-disciplinary interventions, as well as legislation such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* in the USA. Conversely, socio-cultural perspectives have supported long term community based partnership programs that focus on the alignment of social and cultural contexts. The second point is the limited attention to cross-sectorial perspectives, particularly those of teachers and educators who enact transitions policies and practices. Critical theoretical perspectives work towards cross-sectorial programs that are long term, inclusive, socially just, and negotiated with families and communities. They also challenge normative and stereotypical constructions of readiness, transitions, standards and standardization.

The emergence of power as a theme within the literature is consistent with the application of critical theoretical perspectives to transitions to schooling. It raises issues concerned with the context, transitions practices, and distribution of power and its impact. Hierarchical power structures associated with many schools mean that communication is often unidirectional and focused on the supervisory and reporting functions schools perform. These ways of communicating

are being challenged by adopting aspects of socio-cultural theories, and of critical theoretical perspectives that contest hierarchically oriented concepts of power. Critical theories are known for rejecting dominant practices such as the universal application of ideas, for privileging alternative perspectives, and for their aims for socially just societies.

In summary, this critique has highlighted omissions, inconsistencies, and emergent areas in the corpus of transitions to school literature. Omissions include limited interrogation of the conflation of readiness and transitions, and a dearth of cross-sectorial perspectives. Inconsistencies reflect a concern for the agency of children and families, critiques of the impact and distribution of power, and emergent areas reflect an evolving but scant representation of critical theoretical perspectives of recurrent concepts. The following section presents the final step (Step 6) of the IR framework by drawing on Torraco's (2005) ideas of the nature and purpose of the synthesis aspect of an IR. To do this we identified core issues as they intersected with the emerging concept of (dis)continuity. In doing so we contribute to the field by establishing new conceptual and theoretical connections and suggesting new directions for future research.

7. Synthesize the review and report new directions (step 6)

(Dis)continuity permeated all perspectives as an emerging concept within the literature reviewed (5.3.1; 5.3.2; 5.3.3; 5.3.4; 5.3.5). The reframing of continuity expectations noted in one extant review (Dockett & Perry, 2013a) is expanded in this IR to incorporate a range of continuity possibilities. However unresolved differences in understandings of continuity across the theoretical perspectives were identified, particularly between developmental and other perspectives. In Step 6, we capitalize on the panoramic view afforded by the IR process to integrate an array of continuity constructions (*relational*, *policy*, and *practical*) and contribute to new directions for future research in an attempt "to create a new formulation of the topic" (Torraco, 2005, p. 362).

Investigating *relational continuity* addresses the core issue of limited attention to cross-sectorial perspectives of transitions to school, particularly those of educators implementing transitions policies and practices with children and families. Systemic splits between the pre-

compulsory and compulsory early years sectors were referenced in the literature as a significant source of discontinuity (5.3.1; 5.3.4; 5.3.5). Of particular note were references to fundamental philosophical and pedagogical differences in the way educators discussed, understood and enacted transitions practices (Henderson, 2014; Hopps, 2014). Research investigating factors that enable and constrain cross-sectorial professional relationships would make a contribution to the field by providing insights into relational continuity and its impact on transitions.

Consistent with the definition of policy as “process and product” (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 24) and as “both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended” (Ball, 1994, p. 10), we suggest the field is yet to capitalize on and report empirical evidence of transitions *policy continuity*. Conceptualizing policy in this way provides opportunities to speak back to the conflation of readiness and transitions. Drawing on the transitional capital (Dunlop, 2007) of families, communities and educators across the sectors using a negotiated and dialogic process of policy development represents a significant disruption to universal top down policies informed by normative assessments of school readiness. As previously argued (5.3.3), policies that conflate transitions and readiness fail to acknowledge and address the diverse and complex practices of children transitioning to school.

Continuity of practices (*practical continuity*) addresses the core issue of the distribution of power and its impact. This issue, evident in the literature particularly 2010-2015, as ‘power to’ and ‘power over’ (5.3.4) presents opportunities for research to harness powerful practices that draw on the strengths of all stakeholders (Dockett, 2014). Emerging perspectives on power in transitions decisions and processes indicated the need to consider alternative notions of stakeholder relationships (5.3.4) (Henderson, 2012). Our critique suggested that this could include cross-sectorial professional relationships as limited research has been undertaken to date.

8. Conclusion

Application of the Torraco (2005) IR methodology to transitions to school literature (2000-2015) has enabled rigorous examination of a complex topic across international boundaries over an

extended time period. Broadening the analytic lens to include multiple theoretical perspectives offers enhanced opportunities to frame more responsive transitions approaches reflected in the diversity of children, families, communities and educational sites. The findings reveal three significant shifts in the field across this period of time: i) a trend away from developmental perspectives, readiness concepts and universal approaches in the extant reviews towards ecological and socio-cultural perspectives, relationships concepts, and nuanced approaches relevant to specific families and communities; ii) an evolving representation of critical perspectives and attention to power-to promote socially just approaches to transitions to school, and (iii) the emergence of the concept of continuity. By reframing the review findings as relational, practical and policy continuity, the paper suggests ways these new understandings could be applied to innovative approaches to and research into transitions to school. Finally, the review identified the need for research approaches and educational change frameworks that take account of the complexities of stakeholder voices and educational sites to offer fresh insights into persistent concerns surrounding transitions.

Chapter 3: Theory-method package

This chapter presents an overview of the “theory-method package” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 216) employed to generate and analyse evidence in order to investigate the main research question: ‘How might establishing shared understandings of practices enhance continuity during transitions to school?’ In Chapter 2, the integrative literature review (Boyle, Grieshaber, & Petriwskyj, 2018) reframed transitions as relational, policy and practical continuities. Reporting new directions for the field, the review concluded by suggesting that these constructions of continuity could be “applied to innovative approaches to and research into transitions to school” (Boyle, Grieshaber et al., 2018, p.178). The review also revealed an underrepresentation of critical perspectives of transitions to school and invited researchers to undertake research that accounts for “the complexities of stakeholder voices and educational sites” (Boyle, Grieshaber et al., 2018, p.178). As a way of progressing this agenda, this chapter presents an overview of the theory-method package employed in the transitions research reported in this thesis.

Framing the theoretical and methodological frameworks as a package provides an “internally coherent approach” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 217) by considering how theories and methodologies work together. The package provides a conceptual and analytical tool for investigating practices as they happen – in particular places by particular people at a specific point in time under certain conditions for specific reasons/intentions. The package integrates theory and methodology through an iterative process of “zooming in” and “zooming out” on practices (Nicolini, 2012, p. 219), and provides a range of vantage points to interpret and enrich understandings of practices. Investigations into practices start by “zooming in” on particular sites to capture insider perspectives, understandings and experiences of the actual work that goes into the practice (Nicolini, 2012). Through this process, practical concerns affecting participants are exposed in order to negotiate a collective sense of the nature of the concern, and what needs to be done to better understand it – and, if required, to plan future actions to transform practices (Nicolini, 2012). However, “zooming in” on local practices only ever provides a partial story. Hence, “zooming out” affords an opportunity to consider how/if local

activity is enabled and/or constrained by practices beyond the site (Nicolini, 2012). The recursive process of “zooming in” and “zooming out” stops “when a defensible account of both the practice and its effect on the dynamics of organizing [is revealed], showing how that which is local ... contributes to the generation of broader effects” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 219). The package detailed below captures the ‘messiness’ of the research undertaken, and the often hard-to-capture subtle movements between theory and method. An overview of each element in the theory-method package is provided to locate each within broader theoretical and methodological fields, and to highlight the way elements have become entangled over time.

Assembling the package

The methodological elements of the theory-method package, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, are informed by action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, 2005; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). The theoretical elements of the theory-method package, also illustrated in Figure 3.1, are informed by critical theory (Habermas, 1984, 1987), practice theory (Schatzki, 2002, 2003, 2012) and the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer, & Bristol, 2014). This section presents an overview of these elements, highlighting the collective contribution each makes to the research reported in this thesis.

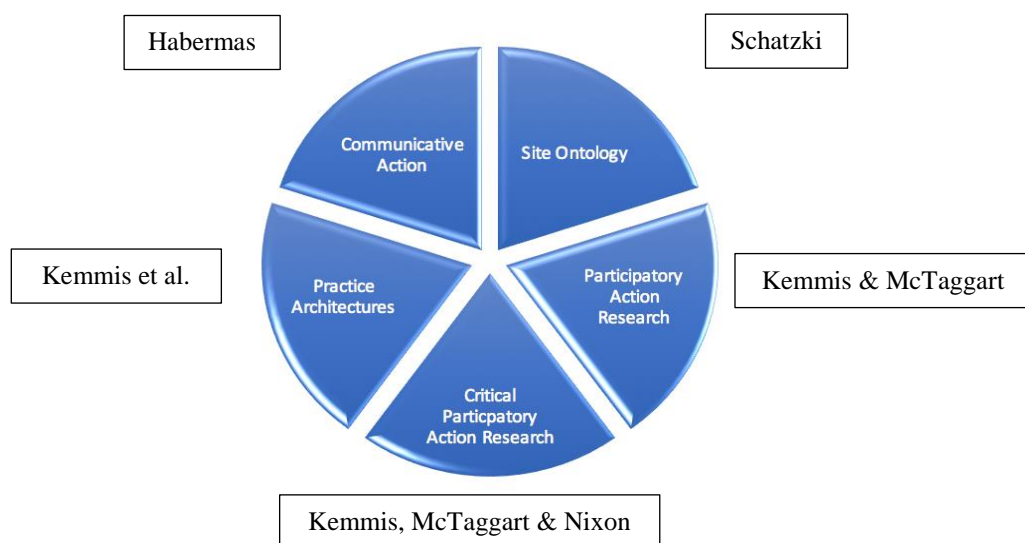


Figure 3.1. The theory-method package.

Action research

The Building Bridges Professional Learning Community (BBPLC) and associated research was initially conceptualised and funded as an action research study. Early conversations about the nature, purpose and principles for participation in the study were informed by Participatory Action Research [PAR] (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, 2005). This methodology had a significant impact on educational thinking in Australia through postgraduate/undergraduate courses related to teacher inquiry (Groundwater-Smith, 2005), and provided a common starting point for planning and documenting the study proposal. Participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, 2005), an emancipatory form of action research, is informed by critical approaches that seek to improve practice, gain greater self-understanding and critique educational settings. Emancipatory approaches provide opportunities for participants to understand their work in new ways through collaborative processes. Informed by critical theory (Habermas, 1984, 1987), PAR acknowledges that participants come to a study with concerns and a commitment to take action based on their critical views of current practice. This approach seeks to understand the way “people and particular settings are shaped and re-shaped discursively, culturally, socially and historically” (Kemmis, 2006, p. 96). This was evidenced in the BBPLC as the participants assembled their shared concerns about transitions practices between their respective settings.

Table 3.1 presents a synthesis of the principles for participation in a PAR study as detailed in the *Action Research Planner* (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The principles reflect the emancipatory aims of the methodology and make explicit the links between the practices and the Habermasian theoretical elements of the package (detailed later in this section). These principles constitute the foundations of the theory-method package of the doctoral study.

Table 3.1

Principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Educational: Participants commit to improving practice and their understandings of the practice in order to articulate an educational rationale for the practice. Improving education (beyond schooling) relies on the capacity of practitioners to recognise and contest institutionalised discourses, actions and relationships.
Ethical: Participants agree on the actions taken and commit to the research plans developed to improve practices and understandings.
Informed: Evidence is gathered to inform reflection on action, plan subsequent cycles and report findings.
Critical: The ‘thematic concern or problem’ to be investigated must be negotiated by the participants. Generally, these concerns reflect irrational, unjust or illogical practices. Requires a critique of the ‘the way things are done’ and contestation of the rationale or justice of the practice from an educational perspective.
Social: Having negotiated a thematic concern participants must consider the social ‘conditions’ under which the investigation will proceed. Consideration of the nature and significance of the social and historical construction of relationships within the group is essential if an equitable and democratic environment is to be established.
Participatory: Having established the conditions or protocols of inquiry, participants negotiate the strategies required to undertake action. These actions must be agreed upon and participants must freely commit to the actions.
Dialogic: Engaging in robust critique and conversations about the issue under investigation is an essential element of the approach. Establishing a shared language helps to facilitate discourse free from misunderstandings, prejudice and confusion.

In 2014, the methodological lens of the study was extended to include a revised version of *The Action Research Planner* (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014). In this version, the “conceptual furniture” (p. 1) of the approach was expanded for two reasons: to include the authors’ theoretical analysis of the nature of practices; and as a response to the authors’ collective concern about what counts as evidence in educational research. Influenced by emergent constructions of practice theory, specifically Schatzki’s (2002, 2003, 2012) notion of site ontology and the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014), the aims of the methodology were extended to include Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR). Table 3.2 presents a synthesis of the principles for participation detailed in the revised edition of the Planner (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014), which add to the principles detailed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.2

Principles of Critical Participatory Action research (CPAR)

Practice-changing practice: More than a research methodology, this is a process of opening up communicative spaces for the social dialogic practice of changing understandings of the conditions in which a practice is enacted (Extension of ‘informed’ – see Table 3.1).
Situational: Mediating pre-conditions (cultural-discursive, material-economic, social-political dimensions) influence and frame practices within sites.
Political: Creates spaces in which rationality and democracy can be pursued together. Activation of a process of enlightenment not affirmation and/or compliance. May not conform to neoliberal educational policies.
Animated by praxis: History-making action – participants are motivated to act for the good of humankind, to do the ‘right thing’. Living well in a world worth living in.

In the 2014 edition of the *Action Research Planner* (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014), the authors strengthened their position on the concept of ‘participation’. Drawing on Habermas’ (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action, the authors argued that participation in a CPAR study requires a commitment to practice-changing practice (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 26). This principle highlights the way participation within a communicative space can be used to change practices (actions) and establish shared understandings of practices and the conditions in which they are enacted. The ‘practice changing practice’ principle identified in Table 3.2 captures the reflexive-dialectical component of the approach which is underpinned by the premise that dialectic thinking can be used to critique the past in light of realities of the present and to acknowledge the role the past played in the formation of the present. Dialectic thought “reveals the power of human activity and human knowledge as both a product of and force in shaping social reality” (Giroux, 2009, p. 34). A new view of practices informed by Schatzki’s (2002, 2003, 2012) concept of site ontology and the Kemmis et al. (2014) theory of practice architectures, accounts for the three remaining principles shown in Table 3.2 and is explained in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter. Chapter 4 of the thesis presents a detailed account of the implementation of these principles in the action research undertaken by the BBPLC. The following section presents an overview of the theoretical elements of the package illustrated in Figure 3.1.

The theory of communicative action

The theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984, 1987) suggests that the world is made up of three types of actions. Two of these (instrumental and strategic) serve technical and practical interests and are orientated to achieve results that can be considered in terms of a ‘means to an end’ approach. The third, communicative action, is orientated to achieve results based on consensus (Habermas, 1984). According to this theory, critiques of society (social practices) should employ communicative action and, in doing so, analyse understandings of situation, power and relationships (Habermas, 1984). Following this theory, the *lifeworld* is the home of communicative action and the *system* is the host of strategic and instrumental action (Habermas, 1987). The lifeworld represents the everyday world we share informally in the domains of social life (e.g., family, culture, work) through which we negotiate shared meanings and understanding. The system represents the structures and established patterns of instrumental and strategic action, and is usually divided into two categories: money and power, and state administration and related institutions (Habermas, 1987). Of relevance to this study is the capacity of the system, through institutions such as schools, to colonise the lifeworld by establishing norms that may not have been generated by the individuals within that lifeworld (Habermas, 1987). When this occurs, communicative actions are at risk of being replaced by systemically driven strategic actions, determined by the economy or by systemic administrators (Habermas, 1987).

Key concepts from this theory (italicised in the quote below) are embedded in action research elements of the theory-method package adopted in this doctoral study. This connection is explicitly evidenced in the following quote: “people engage in communicative action when they make a conscious and deliberate effort to reach (a) *intersubjective agreement* about the ideas and language they use among participants as the basis for (b) *mutual understanding* of one another’s points of view in order to reach (c) *unforced consensus* about what to do in a particular situation” (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 35, emphasis in original). The theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984, 1987) provides a framework for mediating the relationship between theory and

practice by opening communicative (intersubjective) spaces in which ideal speech situations can be facilitated. In this study, the BBPLC was established as an intersubjective space to facilitate communicative action in order to establish shared understandings about transitions to school practices.

In discussing an ideal speech situation, Carr and Kemmis (1986) contend that it “requires a democratic form of public discussion that allows for an uncoerced flow of ideas and arguments and for participants to be free from any threat of domination, manipulation or control” (p. 142). An ideal speech situation is made up of three elements, of which the first element requires the formation of a critical theorem capable of standing up to scientific interrogation; is analytically coherent, and is able to be critiqued in light of the evidence collected (Habermas, 1984). In this study, the participants negotiated the conditions for an ideal speech situation by participating in a communicative space, which they called the Building Bridges Professional Learning Community (BBPLC). Meeting protocols (norms) were negotiated to ensure democratic and uncoerced discussion, and debate could take place in order to reach unforced consensus about transitions practices. The critical theorems negotiated in this space were articulated as the collective aims of the group and the research question.

Activating the second element of the communicative action framework, the organisation of the process of enlightenment, theorems are applied and tested through the reflection and interrogation of the group involved in the action (Habermas, 1984). This process seeks to develop ‘enlightened’ knowledge of the practices undertaken and the conditions under which they take place. This must be an equitable and democratic process whereby each participant has the opportunity to contribute and test his or her own understanding (theory) of the practice (Habermas, 1984). In this study, the participants of the BBPLC engaged in the process of enlightenment by critiquing and reflecting on the evidence gathered to develop shared understandings of practices and plan subsequent actions. This process was undertaken at the beginning of each of the four cycles of action in the communicative (intersubjective) space created by the BBPLC. Chapter 4 provides a

detailed account of these actions. The third element of the communicative action framework, the organisation of action, activates the negotiation of the strategies required to undertake action(s) (Habermas, 1984). These must be agreed upon and participants must freely commit to the action(s), which then form the basis for reflection and the renegotiation of goals and norms. The BBPLC practices mirrored this process where evidence gathered during the cycles of action was used to reflect on and critique practices, inform shared understandings and negotiate future actions of the group.

In summary, the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987) articulates a critical emancipatory framework for engaging in research aimed at achieving “social praxis ...carried out by self-reflective groups concerned to organise their own practice in the light of their organised self-reflection” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 149). The concept of ‘social praxis’ became an area of interest as the action of the BBPLC unfolded, as it was often articulated in terms of a collective quest for continuity. However, up to this point the elements of the theory-method package have not yet been used to account for the site-specific “happening-ness of action and practice” (Kemmis, 2010, p. 417) enacted within the BBPLC. Returning to the theory-method package for clarification and insight, Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon’s (2014) explanation of “a new view of practice” (pp. 3 – 5) provided another point from which to “zoom out” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 219) to understand better the situated-ness of practices and what this had to offer the thesis conceptually and analytically.

Site Ontology

An ontological perspective of practices (Schatzki, 2002, 2003, 2012) offers insights into the way intersubjectivity is prefigured by what Schatzki (2002) has termed the “site of the social” (p. xi). Following Habermas (1984, 1987), Schatzki (2002) states that “practices are organized as nexuses of actions” (p. 77); that “the doings and sayings composing them hang together” (p. 77); and that they “are linked through (1) practical understandings, (2) rules, (3) a teleoaffective structure, and (4) general understandings” (p. 77). Practical understandings, like instrumental and strategic actions (Habermas, 1984, 1987), are associated with having the skill or capacity (knowing

how) to engage in practices through basic sayings and doings (Schatzki, 2002). Rules are explicitly formulated directives, instructions, and principles that direct specific actions (Schatzki, 2012). Teleoaffective structures link the doings and sayings of a practice through a set of teleological hierarchies that establish acceptable performances and emotions about what one ought to do (Schatzki, 2002). These teleological hierarchies were evident in the BBPLC as philosophical tensions, such as different understandings of and approaches to pedagogy. General understandings are abstract senses such as worth, value, and place that orientate practices for the common or intrinsic good (Schatzki 2002). According to Schatzki (2012), “doings and sayings belong to a given practice when they express some of the understandings, teleoaffective components, and rules that make up the organization of that practice” (p. 16). Together these constituent elements combine to establish “normativised” (Schatzki, 2002, p. 80) expectations of the performance of practices (e.g., transitions to school) within and beyond the site.

Establishing shared understandings of a practice therefore is conditional on the capacity/disposition of practitioners to negotiate expectations of what ought to be done within a particular site. It is important to note that Schatzki (2002) acknowledges that the achievement of “shared understandings does not exclude disagreement ... actors typically diverge in their knowledge of the action circumstances ... these differences underpin divergent judgements ... leaving open the possibility of disagreement” (p. 78). This openness to disagreement was reflected in a significant shift in the negotiation of shared understandings of transitions to school by the BBPLC participants as they realized this outcome was not dependent on them becoming mirror images of each other. Hence, the view of the way practices, such as the actions of the BBPLC, were held together within the ‘site of the social’ by the four internal organisers provides insights into the way intersubjectivity was negotiated through sayings and doings. However, the role relationships played in these negotiations towards shared understandings emerged as a key finding in the study, but was not adequately theorised or accounted for in Schatzki’s notion of practices. The theory of practice architectures thus provided a helpful means by which to fill this gap.

Theory of practice architectures

The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) critiques individualistic understandings of practices by asserting that people encounter each other in intersubjective spaces and that “these spaces are already arranged in particular ways, so that people receive one another in these spaces in ways already shaped for them by the arrangements that are already to be found there – and sometimes by new objects brought there” (p. 4). Extending Habermas’s (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action and Schatzki’s (2002, 2003, 2012) concept of site ontology, the theory of practice architectures contends that practices are made up of three kinds of arrangements (cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political) that always already exist in some form in the intersubjective spaces in which we encounter one another. According to this theory, people engage in practices within intersubjective spaces that have three interdependent and inseparable dimensions: semantic space, physical-space-time and social space. The way practices unfold within these spaces is preconfigured (but not predetermined) by the conditions (arrangements) found at or brought to the space. In this study, “practice traditions” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 5) – shaped by the evolution of the pre-compulsory and school sectors and re-shaped by ongoing professional differences – were significant factors influencing the negotiation of shared understandings of practices.

The first dimension of intersubjective space – semantic space – is encountered through the medium of language. It is enabled and/or constrained by the cultural-discursive arrangements found at or brought to the space (Kemmis et al., 2014). When considering the practices associated with transitions to school, a constraining condition (arrangement) might be the absence of shared language and understandings of key developmental and structural elements (e.g., pedagogy and curriculum). The second dimension – physical-time space – is encountered through the medium of activity and work. In this space, practices are enabled and/or constrained by material-economic arrangements of the site (Kemmis et al., 2014). In this study, the physical arrangement of a co-located long day care centre and school enabled sustained interactions aimed at enhancing

continuity for children and families transitioning to school. The third dimension – social space – is encountered through the medium of power and solidarity. In this space, relationships are enabled and/or constrained by social-political arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2014). During transitions to school, relationships can be constrained by an unequal distribution of power among stakeholders, resulting in discontinuities. Again, this was apparent in the BBPLC. Together these three dimensions form the “practice architectures” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 17) that shape the way practices unfold in particular sites. In this study, transforming transitions practices was contingent on the transformation of the “existing arrangements in the intersubjective spaces that support practices” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 6). The actions undertaken by members of the BBPLC to effect this transformation are reported in Chapters 5-7 of this thesis.

In conclusion, Nicolini’s (2012) concept of a theory-method package provides a lens to “zoom in” on the “happening-ness” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 29) of the research, and to “zoom out” to make sense of the practices in order to formulate a comprehensible description of the research; and to inform future actions (Cardiff, 2012). As illustrated in Figure 3.1 and detailed above, the elements of the package presented in this thesis are inextricably entwined with the critical participatory approaches and theories developed by Stephen Kemmis and colleagues (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, 2005; Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014) before and over the lifetime of the thesis. The following chapter presents a detailed account of the nexus between the site, the participants, their practices and the evidence presented in this thesis.

Chapter 4: The Building Bridges Professional Learning Community

Building on the theory-method package presented in Chapter 3, this chapter presents an overview of the practices undertaken by the members of the Building Bridges Professional Learning Community (BBPLC) to negotiate shared understandings of transitions to school practices. Acknowledging that people can inhabit the same site in different ways and that practices rarely if ever unfold in the same way across different sites, this chapter details the “practice landscape” (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 58) of the BBPLC. First, the physical location of the study is identified to connect the site to the historical context and “practices traditions” (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer, & Bristol, 2014, p. 31) presented in Chapter 1. Next, following the participatory principles of the action research approach employed, the formation of a shared concern about transitions practices leading to the formation of BBPLC is explicated. Then, detailed information about the participants is provided to supplement the limited information provided within the published articles (Chapters 5 – 6). Similarly, a comprehensive summary of the evidence gathered throughout the study is presented to provide a thicker description (Creswell & Miller, 2000) of the empirical study undertaken. Finally, ethical and validity considerations are discussed. By profiling the “practice landscape” (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 58) in this way, the chapter reiterates the nexus between the arrangements found at and brought to the site, the practices undertaken by the members of the BBPLC investigating the research question, and the site ontological (Schatzki, 2002, 2005, 2012) perspective applied to the findings of the study.

The physical location

The physical location of the site contributes to the “practice traditions” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31), shaping the arrangements that enable and constrain understandings of transitions practices. The BBPLC was situated in a small coastal town in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW). This site accommodates a co-located Long Day Care (LDC) centre and a primary school. Although the two settings have different governance and accreditation authorities, they both operate

under the auspices of the same non-government religious organisation. Prior to the commencement of the BBPLC, interactions between the primary school and long day care centre had been irregular and intermittent.

The primary school was established in 1997 and, in the year the study was undertaken, had an enrolment of 419 students. In 2013 the school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2018) value was 1122, placing it well above the Australian average of 1000. Priority for enrolment was provided to children baptised into the affiliated religion, and to siblings of children already enrolled. In 2013 the school accommodated two kindergarten class groups with 30 children³ in each class. The school's approaches to curriculum and pedagogy are informed by state-based syllabus documents based on the Australian Curriculum. Typically, play-based pedagogies are not employed in Kindergarten classes in NSW (Boyle & Grieshaber, 2013; Luke, 2010).

The long day care (LDC) centre opened in 2010 and has the capacity for 76 children from birth to six years to attend each day. It is a community-based centre with priority of access provided to children from families who work, who are seeking work, or who are studying. In the year the study was undertaken, the centre had one pre-school room accommodating up to 45 children each week. Education and care in the pre-compulsory sector is informed by *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia* (EYLF) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), which advocates the employment of play-based pedagogies. In the year the study was undertaken, approximately 85 % of the children attending the LDC transitioned to the co-located primary school. Most years the centre has a waiting list for prospective enrolments, although this varies according to fluctuating vacancies across days and rooms.

³ Kindergarten is the first year of compulsory schooling in New South Wales. Class sizes are not capped in non-government schools

Establishing shared concerns

The first phase of a Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) study involves identifying contradictions of the rationality of the “the way we do things around here” (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 58). This can take the form of observations of illogical, irrational practices by individuals or groups over a period of time. In the case of the BBPLC, three key concerns/tensions were identified: i) a lack of alignment between and understanding of cross-sectorial curricula and learning frameworks; ii) confusion about the school’s enrolment policies and procedures; and iii) limited cross-sectorial communications or interactions. These concerns, and the actions undertaken to establish a cross-sectorial study aimed at addressing them, are detailed later in this chapter.

As stated in Chapter 1, it is the responsibility of Australian state authorities to mandate minimum and maximum ages for commencing school. In the state of NSW, children can start kindergarten at the beginning of the school year if they turn five on or before the July 31st of that year. By law, all children must be enrolled in school by their sixth birthday (New South Wales Department of Education, 2018b). The resulting age differential (up to eighteen months within the same kindergarten cohort) and option to enrol early or late means parents can be left with the challenging dilemma of deciding when their child should start school. Generally, advice informing these decisions is varied and conflicted although it almost always focuses on developmental constructions of school readiness (Margetts, 2013). A national survey conducted by Edwards, Taylor and Fiorini (2011) found 31.32 % of parents from NSW chose to delay school entry, which was more than three times the rate of delay in any other Australian state or territory. While the reason for doing so was not stated, the high delay rate is consistent with evidence that suggests the absence of a play-based curriculum in NSW places increased demands on children entering school to be prepared for more structured approaches to learning (Blake, 2013). Inconsistent views among teachers across the pre-compulsory and compulsory school sectors who are advising parents in this decision-making process add to the complexity of the decision in this state (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014). Different understandings of transitions to school across the sectors form “practice traditions”

that “encapsulate the history of the happeningness of the practice, allow it to be reproduced, and act as a kind of collective ‘memory’ of the practice” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31)

At this particular site and time (2013), a change to the school’s enrolment policy resulted in the minimum enrolment age being reduced by four months from 4.9 years to 4.5 years. This change activated a concern for Kate⁴, the Assistant Principal of the primary school, as one of her responsibilities was to co-ordinate enrolment procedures. This included facilitating the transition to school program and, with the principal, interviewing parents submitting enrolment applications. Kate’s concerns, shared by the principal and Kindergarten teachers, reflected a traditional discourse of readiness based on the assumption that starting school early may be detrimental to long-term success and outcomes (Dockett & Perry, 2003; Karoly, 2016). At this site, the practice of delaying school entry was prevalent. This practice was supported and actively encouraged by the school, which cited escalating curricular demands and pressures for children to ‘settle early’ as a prime concern. Paula (LDC Director), Penny and Peta (Preschool⁵ teachers) were also concerned about contradictions between the school’s enrolment policy allowing children to enrol ‘early’ and observations of practices that actively discouraged early enrolment. They also reported a professional concern about providing advice to parents that might conflict with the advice provided by the school. Furthermore, they believed parents and the wider community positioned the school’s authority (and advice) above their own. Tensions around procedures for gathering evidence of school readiness are not unique to this site (Hopps, 2004), however, in the context of establishing a shared concern, the LDC teachers identified the procedure as a source of irrational, illogical and potentially unjust practices.

Danny, the Assistant Director of the school’s governance authority⁶, was aware that changes to enrolment policies and practices had been problematic for some schools in his jurisdiction. In

⁴ All participants are identified by pseudonym.

⁵ *Preschool* is the last year of the non-compulsory school sector

⁶ In this thesis, I refer the school’s governance authority as the Education Services (ES) team

part, these concerns were addressed by holding professional development forums⁷ about the principles and practices of the EYLF (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) and understandings of school readiness. While these forums were well attended and received, they also served to highlight enduring philosophical fractures informing disparate policies and practices between the pre-compulsory and compulsory school sectors. Responding to this concern, Danny instigated and funded a series of professional development initiatives for teachers and administrators. As co-located LDC and school services are not common in this jurisdiction, Danny paid particular attention to cross-sectorial collaborations at this site. Observing limited interaction between the co-located LDC centre and school, Danny expressed his concerns that there was ‘a missed opportunity’ for innovative practices that would support continuity between the sectors.

Kate, the Assistant Principal subsequently expressed interest in applying for ‘transitions’ funding, available at the time from the Education Services team. Danny supported Kate’s idea to use the funding to investigate transitions to school and suggested we (Kate, Paula and I) meet to discuss our initial ideas/concerns and ascertain the feasibility of creating a communicative space in which to investigate these concerns. Although initially cautious, Paula agreed to participate and together we planned, wrote and submitted the successful funding application. Soon after, the BBPLC was established to investigate cross-sectorial understanding of transitions to school practices.

The Participants

The participants in the study included two preschool teachers (Penny and Peta) and two kindergarten teachers (Karen and Kris). Four executive staff also agreed to participate including the Director of the LDC centre (Paula), the Principal (Kevin) and Assistant Principal (Kate) of the primary school; and the Assistant Director of the Education Services team (Danny). All of the participants were either directly or indirectly involved in transitions practices and policies at the co-

⁷ I conducted two of these forums in my role as a professional development facilitator for the ES team.

located site during 2013. Whilst Kevin and Danny were invited to engage in all of the research activities, their participation was limited due to time constraints (see evidence sets⁸ for details).

Table 4.1

*Participant Information*⁹

Pseudonym	Role	Qualifications
Penny	Preschool teacher Long Day Care Centre	ND Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)
Peta	Preschool teacher Long Day Care Centre	ND Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)
Paula	Director Long Day Care Centre	1977 Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) 1991 Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)
Karen	Kindergarten teacher Primary School	ND Bachelor of Education (Primary)
Kris	Kindergarten teacher Primary School	1970 Diploma of Teaching (Infants) 1985 Bachelor of Education (Primary) 1990 Graduate Certificate in Arts (RE)
Kate	Assistant Principal Primary School	1981 Diploma of Teaching (Primary) 1988 Bachelor of Education (Primary)
Kevin	Principal Primary School	1986 Diploma of Teaching (Primary) 1990 Bachelor of Education (Primary) 1998 Graduate Diploma Religious Education 2006 Master of Education
Danny	Assistant Director Education Services Team	1979 Diploma of Teaching (Primary) 1982 Bachelor of Education (Primary) 1985 Graduate Diploma School Administration 1987 Graduate Diploma Religious Education 1993 Master of Education (Hons) 1996 Doctor of Philosophy

Table 4.1 identifies each participant by pseudonym, role and qualifications. Participatory approaches to action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, 2005; Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014) acknowledge the participant's responsibility for and capacity to construct theories and practices. Following Stenhouse (1975), Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) takes "the

⁸ See pages 55 – 60 for details

⁹ This information has been verified by the participants as being correct. Confirmation was required as the survey responses were de-identified.

view that *only* teachers can change teaching practices in local settings, even if they are following advice from elsewhere” (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 25). The approach does not focus on, explain or establish gaps between theory and practice; rather, it attempts to “blur the boundary” (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 25) between theorists and practitioners. From this standpoint, each participant comes to the research with his or her own theories and practices to investigate and interrogate. No participant should be privileged as an expert, as each contributes to the construction of new theories and practices. This standpoint aligns with and supports the contention that practices are inextricably linked to and influenced by the sites in which they are enacted (Schatzki, 2005).

Gathering the evidence

Documenting evidence in CPAR has a specific and shared purpose in the research process. The evidence provides a catalyst for participants to analyse, reflect, interrogate, validate, refute and debate representations of their understandings and practices, as well as the conditions that shape these (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014).

Table 4.2

Evidence gathered

Cycle 1 22.01.13 – 24.04.13	Research Journal
	Survey Questionnaire
	Meeting Transcript (2 hours 25 minutes)
	Interview transcripts (7 hours 8 minutes)
Cycle 2 29.04.13 – 28.06.13	Research Journal
	Meeting Transcripts x 2 (9 hours 46 minutes)
Cycle 3 15.07.13 – 20.09.13	Research Journal
	Meeting Transcript (6 hours 51 minutes)
Cycle 4 08.10.13 – 20.12.13	Research Journal
	Survey Questionnaire
	Meeting Transcript (5 hours 20 minutes)
	Interview transcripts (5 hours 8 minutes)

Documenting, verifying and discussing the evidence gathered in the BBPLC afforded opportunities for the kind of ongoing and collective analysis, authentication and credibility the research approach demands. Consistent with the theory-method package employed, evidence was gathered and analysed throughout all four cycles of the study (see Table 4.2). All of the

conversations captured through this iterative process were transcribed and verified as accurate by the participants. Not all participants are represented in all sets of evidence, but all are represented in some way and to the extent they chose to be. Summaries of sets of evidence below explicate the methods used and justify their selection.

Set 1. Research Journal

The purpose of reflective field notes, identified as a research journal in this study, is to record personal thoughts, hunches, broad ideas or themes that emerge during interactions and observations (Creswell, 2012). As detailed in Table 4.3, a research journal was used to record a range of interactive and observational evidence by the researcher/candidate. The Notebook feature in Microsoft Word™ software allowed me to colour code descriptive field notes and then later add analytical memos, as well as embed photographs, emails and audio recordings.

Table 4.3

Set 1. Research journal

Cycle	Participant	Evidence
1	Tess	Field notes
2	Tess	Reflections
3	Tess	Emails
4	Tess	Photographs
		Audio recordings
		Supervision notes

Reflections on doctoral supervision meetings and associated activities (e.g., reading/discussion groups) were also recorded as they contributed to my understanding of the research process as it unfolded. Gibbs (2007) notes the importance of gathering this type of evidence when he states, “You need to write up these notes, as soon as you can, before the words and events fade from your memory. This process of writing up is actually the first step in your qualitative analysis” (p. 27). This ongoing analysis was an important element of the BBPLC planning and implementation process

Set 2. Meeting transcripts

The purpose of the BBPLC meetings was to establish a communicative space (Habermas, 1984, 1987) in which participants could gather to seek intersubjective agreement about ideas and language, establish mutual understandings of other's points of view, and reach unforced consensus about transitions practices (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In the weeks leading up to the meetings, the participants communicated by email to negotiate a suitable date, time, and venue, and to draft the agenda. Once agreed, the agenda was sent to participants along with any resources required to prepare for the meeting (e.g., background readings). These agendas reflected the range of activities undertaken by the group and demonstrated that the facilitation of the meetings was a collaborative process.

Table 4.4

Set 2. Meeting transcripts

Meeting number.	Date	Cycle	Participants	Length	Evidence
1	07.03.13	1	Peg, Penny, Paula,	2 hours	Agendas
			Karen, Kris, Kate, Tess	25mins	
2	09.05.13	2	Peg, Penny, Paula,	6 hours	Audio recordings
			Karen, Kris, Kate, Tess	13 mins	
3	27.06.13	2	Peta, Penny, Paula,	3 hours	Transcripts Meeting documents
			Karen, Kris, Kate, Tess	33 mins	
4	19.09.13	3	Peta, Penny, Paula,	6 hours	Documenting actions
			Karen, Kris, Kate, Tess, Danny	51 mins	
5	24.10.13	4	Peta, Penny, Paula,	5 hours	
			Karen, Kris, Kate, Tess	20 mins	

Conversations generated by these meetings were rich and robust, and in the communicative space of the BBPLC, boundaries were pushed and comfort zones unsettled (see Chapters 5, 6 & 7). Engaging in critical conversations inevitably raised “unwelcome truths” (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015, p. 604). Following the protocols set down in the BBPLC meeting norms, these ‘unwelcome truths’ were debated openly and respectfully (see Chapters 5, 6 & 7). Table 4.4 shows

the participants met five times throughout the study, which is represented by 25 hours and 22 minutes of recorded conversations. These recordings were professionally transcribed and made available to the participants to check for accuracy. In addition to the audio recordings and transcripts of conversations conducted within the meetings, evidence in the form of the meeting agendas and supplementary meeting documents was also gathered (see Table 4.4).

Set 3. Survey questionnaires

All of the participants¹⁰ were invited to complete a survey questionnaire at the beginning and end of the study. The initial survey questionnaire was designed to gather information about the participants, their understandings of the key concepts of transitions, and their aspirations for and concerns about the research. It was anticipated that the online survey questionnaires would provide Cycle 1 and Cycle 4 with benchmarks to note shifts in understandings across the lifetime of the study. The survey questionnaires were deployed online to provide an anonymous (power neutral) forum for participants to ‘have their say’ (Neuman, 2011).

Table 4.5

Set 3. Survey questionnaire

Date	Cycle	Participants	Evidence set
March 2013	1	8	Survey Reports
November 2013	4	4	Word Clouds

The Cycle 1 survey questionnaire (included as Appendix D) had eight items. The first, a closed question, sought information about the participants’ qualifications. Questions 2 to 5 were open questions seeking responses about participants’ aspirations (potential outcomes) for the research and what might help or hinder the achievement of these. Question 7 presented a series of seven statements about transitions to school and asked the participants to rank the statements from least to most important. The final question invited participants to make a comment or ask a question

¹⁰ See Table 4.1 for a complete list of participants

about the research. At the suggestion of Kate and Paula, the initial survey questionnaire was activated after the first BBPLC meeting. This provided an opportunity for the group to discuss the purpose of the survey-questionnaire, raise any concerns about the instrument and reach consensus on its use¹¹. Following the meeting, an email was sent to each participant re-iterating the purpose, anonymity and importance of articulating honest and open responses to the survey questions. For ease of access, the participants were then invited to respond by clicking on the hyperlink contained in the text of the email. All eight participants involved in the study at the time responded and completed all items.

Consistent with a CPAR (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014) approach, analysis of this evidence commenced as soon as it was gathered, and was used to inform the agenda for the Cycle 2 BBPLC meeting. Given the small number of participants and the sensitivity of some of the issues raised, the evidence was filtered using Wordle™¹² to generate prominent themes within the responses and to de-identify the sources. These were presented at the Cycle 2 meeting to initiate conversations about the issues and concerns identified.

The Cycle 4 survey questionnaire (included as Appendix E) repeated Questions 2 to 7, asking participants to reflect on their lived experience of the BBPLC. The aim of repeating the questions was to analyse responses for changes from Cycle 1 to Cycle 4. This survey questionnaire was deployed after the final BBPLC meeting and as detailed in Table 4.5, the response was quite low with only half of the group completing the survey. Reminder emails containing the link to the online survey were sent to all participants with little or no effect. Early analysis of this phenomena suggested that the anonymous forum option might not have been as necessary by Cycle 4 as it had been earlier in the study.

¹¹ An example of how the research approach and methods were negotiated with the participants.

¹² Wordle™ is an online tool for generating 'word clouds' that give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text. See www.wordle.net

Set 4. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews capture the subjective theories of participants, which Flick (2009) calls the lived experiences of the issue being studied. Interviews were scheduled at the beginning and the end of the study, however not all participants were able to engage in both interviews. Questions for the first round of interviews were planned but relatively unstructured. As a novice interviewer, I drafted an interview plan for each participant. However, in keeping with the CPAR (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014) approach, the intention was for the interview to be more of a conversation than a formally structured process. Each plan included six generic prompts (with probes)¹³ and two specific participant-orientated questions drawn from evidence gathered previously (online survey, meeting notes, research journal). Whilst all of the questions were designed to explore cross-sectorial understandings of transitions practices, the specific participant-orientated questions were included “in order to probe or clarify information provided or points of view expressed” (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 181). It was anticipated that this first round of interviews would take approximately 30 – 40 minutes each to complete; however, as indicated in Table 4.6, many went for much longer. The participants commented on feeling quite comfortable about responding to the questions, and were appreciative of the opportunity to openly express their views about transitions practices within the site.

The second round of interviews prompted the participants to identify and comment on their perceptions of changes to practices and understandings across the year. It was interesting to observe that each respondent spent a substantial amount of time talking about changes to relationships, the conditions that enabled these shifts, and subsequent transformations to understandings and practices. Gathering evidence early (Cycle 1) and later (Cycle 4) facilitated the opportunity for temporal analysis of the evidence gathered (see Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014). This method was included to afford a forum outside of the group meetings to respond to the interview questions and an opportunity to extend or elaborate on evidence using prompting and probing strategies (Creswell,

¹³ See Appendix D.

2012). As Table 4.6 indicates the length of the interviews varied significantly across the participants and cycles. All were audio recorded and professionally transcribed, and copies of transcriptions were made available to participants to check for accuracy (Gibbs, 2007).

Table 4.6

Set 4. Semi-structured interviews

Date	Cycle	Participant	Length (mins)	Evidence
24.4.13	1	Penny	56.10	All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.
8.11.13	4		42.32	
31.7.13	1	Peta	47.39	
8.11.13	4		40.40	
24.4.13	1	Paula	120.24	
8.11.13	4		42.40	
17.4.13	1	Karen	110.17	
8.11.13	4		56.56	
17.4.13	1	Kris	45.47	
8.11.13	4		46.31	
17.4.13	1	Kate	50.35	
8.11.13	4		35.58	
8.11.13	4 ¹⁴	Kevin	39.38	
1.7.13	2 ¹⁵	Danny	103.14	

Ethics, validity and limitations

Low risk ethical clearance was obtained in 2013 through the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane, Australia¹⁶. The QUT ethics approval number for this study is 1300000058. Letters of support consenting to the research being undertaken in the various jurisdictions were obtained from the Education Services authority, the School and the LDC centre, and these were submitted with the QUT ethics application. The participants received detailed written and verbal information about the study at the first BBPLC meeting. Consent forms were distributed and questions answered as/when they arose during and after this meeting. All of the participants listed in Table 4.1 signed and returned an informed consent form (see Appendix F). Co-

¹⁴ Kevin was not available to be interviewed in Cycle 1.

¹⁵ Danny was only available for interview at this time.

¹⁶ Where I was enrolled at the time.

constructed Meeting Norms (see Appendix G) also detailed ethical considerations associated with the conditions of the communicative space created by the BBPLC. These norms were openly discussed at each meeting and, if required, revised to accurately reflect and accommodate concerns or questions raised.

Acting well or ethically requires the researcher to be mindful of the accuracy of stories told as a result of the research. Following the principles of the approach detailed in Chapter 3, this section discusses validity not in order to prove findings, report universal truths or suggest the research can be replicated in other sites. Rather, it presents an overview of approaches taken to ensure, as far as possible, that the research reported is an accurate representation (Gibbs, 2007) of the actions of the BBPLC. Triangulation¹⁷ is the process of cross referencing and cross checking different sources from different standpoints to get more than one perspective about what is happening at any given point in time, and about how these change over time (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p.70). In this study, the methods used to generate and gather evidence were designed to capture the perspectives of individuals (survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, research journal) and the group (meeting notes). According to Kemmis et al., (2014) gathering evidence about practices and practice architectures requires “a reflexive dialectical view of subjective-objective relations and connections” (p. 74). Following this approach, sets of evidence gathered from a range of sources and standpoints over time are used to inform reflections on and conversations about practices and the arrangements enabling and constraining them. This process was activated within the communicative space of the BBPLC by the implementation of actions that required the members of the group to think, rethink and question how particular transitions practices had been shaped by the arrangements holding them in place. These conversations exposed assumptive and uncomfortable knowledge. Lather (1993) uses the term *catalytic validity* to describe the capacity for reflexivity to reorientate and refocus the research process toward knowing reality in order to change it. I used a

¹⁷ See Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 70 for a more detailed explanation of how this differs from a positivist understanding of this term.

research journal to record my reflexive contemplations about what was happening in the research, to articulate hunches about these and to raise questions or concerns with others about the research. Supervision meetings also prompted reflexivity, as I was challenged to think critically about the actions of the BBPLC. This dialogue helped to reorientate and refocus my understanding of the research and my role in it.

Establishing the role of the researcher as co-participant can present challenges and raises potential risks to the ethical conduct of a CPAR research project. Early in the study, I struggled to define my role within the group. This led me to question the authenticity of my status as a ‘participant’ and to consider the influence (positive and negative) I might bring to bear on the sayings, doings and relatings of the BBPLC. Reflecting on Groundwater Smith and Kemmis’ (2004, pp. 122 – 124) advice to academic partners, I recognised many of their recommended risk minimisation strategies had already been put in place when establishing the BBPLC. These were: i) possessing an established record of working with schools; ii) commencing a potential partnership positively but cautiously; iii) building clear, shared understandings of goals, roles and expectations; iv) establishing relationships based on mutual trust, recognition and respect; v) making sure participants are aware of, and give permission for, any use by the academic partner of relevant material arising from the collaboration; and vi) exploring the particular strengths and needs for expertise each participant brings to the relationship. This last point was of particular relevance and importance, as the practices of the BBPLC were enacted in a number of integrated yet separate lifeworlds (Habermas, 1984). As such, participation came to be understood as a fluid and fluctuating phenomenon whereby the participants came to recognise the ‘expert’ in each other. This shared understanding of participation, in conjunction with the aforementioned strategies, acted to negate or minimise inherent power differentials of privilege or position associated with the status of ‘expert’ (Pillow, 2003).

Critical participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014), by design and intent, provides multiple opportunities for respondent validation (Gibbs, 2007) to take place. In this study

transcripts of individual interviews and group meetings were provided for participants to read and comment on whether they felt the text captured the essence of the meeting, if unspoken nuanced messages were missed, or to request the erasure of sensitive, controversial or inaccurate content. At each meeting, the evidence gathered in the previous cycle was presented for comment, clarification and elaboration. The iterative nature of analysis meant that ‘hunches’ gathered from early analysis by the group – or myself as the researcher participant – were presented as points of discussion. These conversations informed the meeting agendas and actions of the group in the subsequent cycles and, if required, amendments to the BBPLC aims. The Education Services team required a written report of the BBPLC study to be submitted. The report, co-written by the members of the BBPLC, afforded a rich context for participant validation.

The papers included in this thesis have been co-authored with my doctoral supervision team. Having two or three researchers conduct the analysis of evidence both reduces the risk of bias, and enhances consistency and accuracy of techniques such as coding (Gibbs, 2007). Collaborating on interpretations of analysis, in this case with expert researchers, assists the novice researcher to apply a more rigorous analysis process and crosscheck interpretations. Such collaborations undertaken in a doctoral supervision context can be viewed as an external auditing process (Creswell & Miller, 2000), adding to the consistency of the analysis undertaken and reported in the published papers and this thesis.

In CPAR (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014), the site is significant as it forms the lifeworld in which the practices are enacted, and replicating the lifeworld (site, participants and shared concerns) in order to generalise findings is neither possible nor necessary. Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) claim that documenting findings serves the purpose of sharing a story with an appropriate audience so that they may learn something – in much the same way one might learn from history and the experiences of others. Stake (1995) describes this transference of meaning as naturalistic generalisation, which he defines as “conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if

it happened to themselves” (p. 85). Furthermore, Elliot (2007) argues “that the greater the particularisation of descriptions of action situations, the greater their potential to throw light on possibilities for action in other situations” (p. 238). It is anticipated that the analysis, interpretation and interrogation of the evidence gathered in the BBPLC study will prompt others to consider ways to transform practices within their own sites. The naturalistic narrative style of reporting findings inherent in this approach could be considered a limitation if the reader is looking to replicate the study and/or seeking answers to universal problems – even though neither are intended outcomes of the study.

The persistence of positivist elements, evidenced in the structure, style and formatting requirements of scholarly journals, also has the potential to limit the research narrative (St Pierre, 2014). Writing this thesis, I feel similarly limited by the structure, style and formatting recommended for submission and examination. By way of a push back to these limitations I have followed the example of Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) by avoiding the use of positivist language within this thesis (e.g., findings/evidence rather than data). While doing so, I acknowledge this stance could be perceived by others as a limitation of academic rigour.

While there are multiple factors constraining the scope of research investigating cross-sectorial professional practices across an entire year, it is worth noting the enabling effect of ‘time’ on this research. The funding provided to release the participants from their day-to-day tasks enabled these teachers to meet regularly and for sustained periods of time. Having the time to establish a communicative space to engage in respectful, open, and sometimes uncomfortable conversations about practices are essential requirements of the Critical Participatory Action Research (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014) approach employed in this study. In some contexts, especially the prior-to-school sector, finding the time to meet these participatory requirements could also be seen as a prohibitive limitation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a detailed account of the practice landscape, the participants, and the methods employed to generate the evidence gathered of the BBPLC. The chapter foregrounds the nexus between arrangements found at and brought to the site and the role they played in shaping practices. By employing a site ontological lens this doctoral study captures the “reality of practices as things that are always *situated* in time and space” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 33). The following three chapters (all publications preceded by framing texts) present the findings of the study and investigate the question ‘How might shared understandings of practices enhance continuity during transitions to school?’

Chapter 5: Relational continuity

This chapter presents empirical evidence of relational continuity, one of the three new directions for the field identified in the integrative literature review presented in Chapter 2. The article presented in this chapter (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014) was developed in response to a call for papers in a special issue of *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, edited by two eminent scholars in the transitions to school field (Aline-Wendy Dunlop and Sally Peters). The brief to prospective authors for contributions highlighted an important shift in the field, namely a trend away from thinking about transitions to school as ‘readiness’ to a focus on respect and reciprocity in relationships between stakeholders supporting transitions. This perspective, identified in this thesis as relational continuity, was, at the time (2014), under-represented in the field. In particular, investigations into the impact cross-sectorial professional relationships have on transitions to school practices and continuity were absent from the literature. The iterative analysis undertaken throughout the study revealed that cross-sectorial relationships among the professionals responsible for implementing transitions practices and policies were fundamental to understanding how or if the negotiation of shared understandings of practices might enhance continuity during transitions to school. In order to address this gap, the authors (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014) extended the scope of literature identified in Chapter 2 to include books, chapters, and scholarly journal articles addressing professional relationships between early years educators and teachers. Reviewing this extended body of literature highlighted three interconnected elements: i) concepts of cross-sectorial professional relationships; ii) factors that constrain or enable the development of relationships; and iii) constructions of continuity supported by these relationships. These elements informed the questions explored in the Boyle and Petriwskyj (2014) article, and framed analysis of the research data. This was the first article published¹⁸ in this sequence, and it served as a pivot point for refinement of the thesis direction and subsequent papers. The analytical lens applied to the evidence reported in this article was informed by the theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984,

¹⁸ But not written – Article C was written before Article B.

1987), participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998, 2003, 2005) and critical participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). The analysis reported in this article identified connections between relationships, practice and change that were not readily explained. This limitation led to the re-examination of the theoretical framework for the thesis and re-consideration of the complex nature of the site, and of the practices being enacted within the BBPLC. Subsequently, the site ontological (Schatzki, 2002, 2003, 2012) and theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014) elements were added to the theory-method package. Although this article was not the first of the findings chapters to be written and submitted for publication, it was evident that ‘relationships’ formed the foundations for reporting the overall outcomes of the study and so it has been presented first in the series of articles reporting findings in the thesis.

Article B (Boyle & Petrowskyj, 2014) has been cited in three significant international publications:

Dockett, S. & Einarsson, J. (2017). Continuity and change as children start school. In N. Ballam, B. Perry & A. Garpelin (Eds.) *Pedagogies of educational transitions: European and antipodean research* (pp. 133 – 149). Cham: Switzerland.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017). *Starting Strong V: Transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*. Paris: OECD

Lillejord, S., Borge, K., Halvorsrud, K., Ruud, E. & Freyr, T. (2017). *Transition from kindergarten to school: A systematic review*. Oslo: Knowledge Centre for Education.

The research reported in this chapter has also been disseminated at the following conferences:

Boyle, T. & Petrowskyj, A. (2014, December). *Transitions to school: Reframing professional relationships*. Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference. Brisbane, Australia.

Boyle, T. & Petrowskyj, A. (2015, September). *Transitions to school: Reframing professional relationships*. Paper presented at the Early Years Conference, Cairns, Australia.

Article B

Boyle, T., & Petriwskyj, A. (2014). Transitions to school: Reframing professional relationships.

Early Years: An International Research Journal, 34(4), 392-404.

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Transitions to school: Reframing professional relationships¹⁹.

Abstract

Systemic splits between pre-compulsory and compulsory early years education impact on transitions to school through discontinuities in children's experience. This paper presents data from a critical participatory action research project about transitions between pre-compulsory and compulsory early education schooling in Australia. The project aim was to investigate how transitions to school might be enhanced by developing deeper professional relationships and shared understandings between teachers from both sectors. Within the communicative space afforded by a professional learning community the participants engaged in critical conversations about their understandings of transitions practices and conditions, including systemic differences. Data analysis provides a snapshot of changes in teachers' thinking about professional relationships, continuity and factors influencing cross-sectorial professional relationships. Findings suggest that affording opportunities for teachers to re-frame cross sectorial professional relationships has led to transformative changes to transitions practices, understandings and conditions.

Keywords: transitions to school; critical participatory action research; cross-sectorial professional relationships; professional learning community.

Introduction

Discontinuities in children's experience arising from systemic splits between pre-compulsory and compulsory early years education impact on transitions to school. Split systems have adverse effects on children due to differences in understandings of children, programme content and pedagogical approaches (Kaga, Bennett and Moss, 2010). In the state of New South Wales, Australia, this split is evidenced as children transition from pre-school (non-compulsory) to kindergarten (first year of

¹⁹ Text is consistent with the journal guidelines: Chicago AD reference style and UK spelling.

compulsory schooling). Typically, this transition occurs in the year the child turns five though in this state, parents tend to ‘hold-back’ their children for an additional year (Edwards, Taylor and Fiorini 2011). Teacher’s perceptions of school readiness exemplify systemic differences that have been identified as tensions within cross-sectorial professional relationships (Henderson 2012). Literature on relationships between teachers in the two sectors has emerged recently in the context of a broader focus on relational aspects of transition to school and an exploration of critical perspectives (Boyle and Grieshaber 2013; Petriwskyj 2013; Dunlop 2007; Moss 2008, 2013). Calls to re-conceptualise or re-frame these relationships have intensified as recent policy changes across western countries including Australia have provided new opportunities and challenges to do so (Moss 2013). This paper presents findings from a small-scale critical participatory action research study investigating how transitions to school might be enhanced through re-conceptualised cross-sectorial professional relationships.

The project began in 2012 a primary school requested researcher involvement with a proposal for transitions funding available at the time. Most of the children transitioning to the school also attend a co-located Long Day Care Centre yet interactions between the two separately administered sites had been limited. Conversations with teachers in both sectors revealed an enthusiasm for engaging in collaborations aimed at deepening their understandings about transitions and their professional relationship. Subsequently, the Building Bridges Professional Learning Community (BBPLC) was established and continues to meet at least once every school term to plan activities across both sites and engage in professional learning and conversations about transitions. In this paper, we report findings drawn from data collected during 2013, to provide a snapshot of teachers’ thinking about concepts of professional relationships, continuity and factors influencing cross-sectorial professional relationships. We begin by discussing how three inextricably entwined elements of cross-sectorial relationships identified by participants in the BBPLC (Boyle and Grieshaber 2013) are presented in the extant transitions literature (2004 -2014).

Literature Review

Concepts of cross-sectorial professional relationships

The transitions literature in which cross-sectorial professional relationships forms a major element presents four ways in which concepts of relationships can be conceived. These are functional linkages, systemic linkages, partnership interactions, and dialogic interactions.

Functional linkage concepts of cross sectorial professional relationships involve uni-directional information delivery such as the transfer of child records to schools at the end of preschool or the provision of advice to preschools regarding school expectations of children's readiness (Petriwskyj 2013; Noel 2011). Since functional linkages are dominated by pressure to prepare children for school, they are characterised by asymmetrical power dynamics (Henderson 2012; Moss 2008). Systemic linkages range from teacher visits to classrooms, joint meetings and coordination of school orientation visits (Boyle and Grieshaber 2013; Barblett, Barratt-Pugh, Kilgallon and Maloney 2011; Dockett and Perry 2007; Einarsdottir, Perry and Dockett 2008; Noel 2011) to more extensive system and policy alignment (Kagan 2010). While systemic linkages are bi-directional and involve more sustained contact, they are sometimes attended by defensiveness arising from readiness pressure (Moss 2008). System-level linkages remain a core element of transitions relationships however recent literature has emphasised interpersonal interactions through partnerships or networks characterised by collaboration and reciprocal communication (Arnup 2014; Barblett et al 2011; Dockett and Perry 2007; Noel 2011; Peters 2014).

Concern about inequality between the sectors has prompted the emergence of the concept of dialogic interaction described by Moss (2013, 229) as a 'pedagogical meeting place marked by mutual respect, dialogue and co-construction'. This concept of relationships involves negotiation of the borderland between sectors through dynamic and open co-construction of understandings (Moss 2013; Peters 2014). There is acknowledgement that the two sectors have identities that should not be lost (Dunlop 2013; Woodhead 2007) and that engaging in deep professional debate requires a shared space such as a professional learning community (Henderson 2012). Further research into

this emerging concept of dialogic interactions is required, in order to find new ground marked by co-contribution and power equality (Bennett and Kaga 2010; Moss 2013).

Factors that constrain or enable the development of relationships

The structural, attitudinal, pedagogic and process factors that constrain or enable professional relationships are interwoven with discussion of relationship concepts, and sometimes associated with a specific concept.

Structural constraints such as timetable misalignment, lack of time to consult, or high staff turnover in pre-compulsory settings (Petriwskyj 2013; Barblett et al. 2011) have been noted in studies on system linkages and coordination. Structural enablers include pragmatic measures such as altering timetables to facilitate meetings or classroom visits by teachers and alternating the venue for meetings between settings (Petriwskyj 2013; Noel 2011). The imposition of organisational measures such as aligning programmes and policies may, however, impact on teacher attitude as a constraint as pressure to become more alike has been identified as a source of tension (Barblett et al. 2011; Bennett and Kaga 2010; Kagan 2010).

The literature on linkages has identified attitudinal constraints such as the unwillingness of teachers in pre-compulsory settings to engage with schools (Noel, 2011). Literature on interactional relationships has focused on the de-valuing of pre-compulsory programmes and the domination of decision-making by schools (Moss, 2013). The attitudinal enablers of mutual respect, reciprocity and trust, and of critical reflection on power dynamics (Petriwskyj 2013; Dockett and Perry 2007) are evident in literature focused on partnership and dialogic relationships respectively.

Pedagogic barriers such as differences in learning environments, strategies and teacher expectations or lack of knowledge about teaching in other settings have been linked to philosophical differences based in the separate traditions of the two sectors (Moss 2013; Woodhead 2007). Pedagogic enablers such as the knowledge of curriculum and discussions of classroom pedagogies (Henderson 2012; Peters 2014) rely on shared professional understanding, yet Henderson (2012) has warned that some relationships that emphasised teachers becoming more alike caused tension.

Enabling processes for overcoming the barriers between teachers include researching with teachers to draw on their transition capital (Dunlop 2007), making practice more visible as a basis for discussion, leadership, and the establishment of a professional learning community (Arnup 2014; Henderson 2012; Moss, 2013; Peters 2014).

Constructions of continuity supported by these relationships

Constructions of continuity during transitions, representing differing theoretical perspectives, are also interwoven with concepts of cross-sectorial relationships. Within functional linkages, continuity has been constructed as readiness or preparing children for school (Moss 2013), reflecting developmental perspectives. This construction has been criticised for failing to appreciate the strengths of preschool curricula and pedagogies (Moss 2013).

Continuity within system linkages has been constructed as priming events such as orientation visits by children, introductory school meetings for families and involvement of the wider community in transition events, or as more extensive integration of curricula (Dockett and Perry 2007; Kagan 2010). These constructions of continuity indicate ecological perspectives that take account of the broader contexts of children's lives. Some constructions focus on the seamlessness of transitions through provision for play in the school programmes (Grieshaber and Boyle 2013) or 'making the school ready for children' (Moss 2013, 228), yet extensive alignment sometimes risks the "schoolification" of pre-compulsory education (Bennett and Kaga 2010).

The inclusion of families and communities has also been evident in partnerships, with continuity constructed as relationship-building amongst stakeholders, indicating socio-cultural perspectives. Continuity has been constructed as the incorporation of cultural backgrounds in the school programme, collaboratively-planned transition activities, buddy programmes, and class planning that takes account of children's friendships (Arnup 2014; Petriwskyj 2013).

The emerging vision of dialogic relationships as a professional meeting place, however, draws on a shared culture in which neither sector dominates, and is framed by a critical perspective (Moss 2013). Critical constructions of continuity offer opportunities for reciprocal change in transitions

practice such as teachers' negotiation of shared philosophical statements, provision of more personalized transitions strategies and inclusive involvement of all stakeholders in co-development of transitions approaches (Petriwskyj 2013; Henderson 2012). Moss (2008) argues that such changes to transitions draw on collaborative experimentation and critically reflective thought, and that further research into this approach is required. This study seeks to address this gap in the extant literature by examining how dialogic relationships can facilitate changes to transitions practices, understandings and conditions.

Theoretical perspective and methodology

Habermasian (1987) concepts of 'communicative action' and 'communicative space' inform the critical participatory action research methodology (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014) employed in this study. Communicative action requires participants to negotiate inter-subjective agreement as a basis for shared understanding, so as to reach an unforced consensus about what to do in a particular situation (Habermas 1987). This action opens up a respectful communicative space between participants, builds solidarity and underwrites the conditions under which open, reflective and substantive conversations and actions take place (Habermas 1987). Drawing on these concepts, critical participatory action research:

aims to help participants to transform i) their *understandings* of their practices; ii) the *conduct* of their practices, and iii) the *conditions* under which they practice, in order that these things will be more rational, more productive and sustainable, and more just and inclusive. (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014, 67)

This methodology gathers evidence through conversations among those involved in order to raise questions (e.g., about relationships), stimulate further dialogue and help the participants to reflect on and (possibly) transform understandings, practices and conditions. The participants of this study, with the researcher in the role of critical friend and facilitator, convened the Building Bridges Professional Learning Community [BBPLC] as a communicative space in which to consider the

conditions and understandings that inform transitions to school practices in that particular context. Initially, a professional learning community model was suggested as the format for the project as some of the teachers had positive experiences with this format and because it sets up protocols or conditions for the actions that take place within the community. These conditions were negotiated at the first gathering, documented and signed by all participants thereby establishing the conditions of a culture of respect and collaboration detailed by Dufour and Fullan (2013). Philosophical differences and potential tensions within the group were key considerations during the negotiation of these conditions. Later, these were identified by the researcher/facilitator as being in accordance with the conditions set down by Habermas (1987) and Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014, 49) for the creation of a communicative space within which participants can “establish a relationship in which people can think openly, respectfully and critically together’.

Critical participatory action research engages participants in actions and conversations about understandings, practices and conditions within a communicative space, which in this study was the BBPLC. This requires consideration of five steps within each cycle of action (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014). Within the BBPLC four cycles of action occurred during 2013: i) Reconnaissance: Identifying the concern and establishing a statement of intent. Goals of the BBPLC were negotiated and revised at the beginning of each cycle; ii) Planning: Action plans for each cycle were detailed, diarised and agreed upon. These included transition activities for the children, professional learning activities for the teachers and data collection activities to document the research; iii) Enacting: The cycle action plans were implemented between the meetings; iv) Critically reflecting: During the BBPLC meetings and interviews participants reflected critically on how or if the actions undertaken changed understandings of practices and conditions; v) Re-planning: The action plan for each cycle was informed by the actions of the previous cycle and by new understandings of practices and conditions.

Methods: Participants, data collection and analysis

Data²⁰ informing this paper are drawn from interviews with six participants of the BBPLC; Penny and Peta from the pre-school room (last year of pre-compulsory sector); Kelly and Kris from the kindergarten room (first year in compulsory sector); Paula Director of the Long Day Care centre; and Kate Assistant Principal of the school. These teachers were involved in all four cycles of action throughout 2013 and have been identified using pseudonyms.

Although survey questionnaires and BBPLC meeting notes were also used to gather evidence, data reported in this paper are drawn from conversations recorded as semi-structured interviews (Kvale 2007). These individual interviews provided participants with a communicative space to engage in conversations about their lived experiences (Flick 2009) of transitions that was not afforded by the BBPLC. Stronger expressions of difference and change were noted in this data set, possibly due to the confidential and personal nature of the individual format. Capturing conversation early (cycle one) and then again late in 2013 (cycle four) provided a pre and post context to compare responses and to identify change. Each participant was asked three generic questions and two specific questions informed by issues raised or comments made in the BBPLC. The interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes and were scheduled at times and locations suited to participants. Participant validation (Kvale 2007) was undertaken by providing each participant with the transcribed interviews to check for accuracy.

Data analysis was guided by three questions identified from the larger study: i) what *concepts* of cross-sectorial professional relationships do teachers in pre-compulsory and compulsory early years education hold? ii) what *factors* do teachers identify that constrain and enable cross-sectorial professional relationships do teachers identify?, and iii) how might cross-sectorial professional relationships facilitate the negotiation of shared understandings to support *continuity* during transitions to school? Transcripts of the cycle one and cycle four interviews were initially coded

²⁰ This publication was written prior to making the decision to use the term ‘evidence’

(Gibbs 2007) as *concepts*, *factors* and *continuity* and then coded again using categories informed by the literature review. Individual category data were then collated into tables where analytical memos (Saldaña 2009) were recorded to note constructions of the categories by the end of cycle four and shifts between cycles. A final analysis of patterns and trends was compared with a second researcher and with frequency counts for each category (see Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). Evidence indicated in the tables below as overall changes are presented as responses to the guiding questions. Consistent with the methodological approach, findings are presented as ‘captured conversations’ so others might take something away from the story (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014).

Findings

What concepts of cross-sectorial professional relationships do teachers in pre-compulsory and compulsory early years education hold?

Concepts of cross-sectorial professional relationships identified in the literature framed category codes as: i) functional: unidirectional linkages, asymmetrical power, senders and receivers; ii) systemic: connections, alignment; iii) partnerships: interpersonal, reciprocal communications and exchanges; and, iv) dialogic: negotiation, shared understandings, transformative actions, symmetrical power dynamics.

By the end of cycle four, teachers held all four concepts of relationship concurrently however dialogic concepts profiled most strongly across both sectors and were linked to the BBPLC. Peta described this interaction in the following way *I found [the BBPLC] very inclusive and everyone was prepared to have dialogue and open their minds and think beyond what they do and see what we did with more open eyes*. This statement is indicative of conversations acknowledging that transitions understandings and practices do not rely on the sectors becoming mirror images or forcing change on one another, but on the gradual negotiation of shared understandings about the conditions in which transitions are enacted. There was a focus on personal contact, listening and awareness of power differentials as a basis for deeper relationships, yet some reservations about

reciprocity in relational initiatives and transitions activities were also expressed. Whilst some teachers identified links between dialogic and partnership concepts, Kate differentiated these: *I don't think it is a partnership because I don't think we've got the same agenda.* Systems concepts of relationships included discussions about the value of classroom visits for deepening understanding of practices and conditions. Karen commented: *We spent half a day there, it was lovely. I've never stepped foot into a preschool or long day care centre, in the actual room where the learning is happening.*

Table 5.1. Concepts of relationship identified by participants.

	Functional		Systems		Partnerships		Dialogic	
	C1	C 4	C1	C4	C 1	C 4	C 1	C 4
Preschool sector	3	2	4	1	7	2	2	8
School sector	5	1	6	4	5	5	2	6
Overall change	8	3	10	5	12	7	4	14

Change from cycle one to cycle four was particularly marked in shifts from functional and systemic linkages to an interpersonal focus on partnerships and dialogic interactions. Kate identified a shift in the nature of the relationship stating, *Because of the time we have been able to spend together we have a relationship, better than it was 12 months ago. I think having that time to [meet and] share thoughts ... I guess I'm talking about a professional relationship.* There was a marked reduction in identification of functional concepts framed by sending-receiving readiness skills information. As shown in Table 5.1 systemic concepts decreased as understandings of systemic pressures and demands deepened. As Kris noted: *Because we've had the professional discussions, we've come to understand each other's situation and clarify our own a lot.* Dialogic concepts shifted from intent to share professional understandings to an increased awareness of power differentials and insights into unforced consensus. The remaining differences between sectors clustered around concepts of systems and partnerships

In summary, concepts of cross-sectoral professional relationships held by this group of teachers encompass functional, systems, partnership and dialogic constructions, which are often held concurrently. There was a shift from systemic and functional linkages to interpersonal concepts of relationships, most notably dialogic constructions.

What factors do teachers identify as constraining and enabling cross-sectorial professional relationships?

Enabling and constraining factors influencing the development of professional cross-sectorial relationships identified in the literature were assigned as category codes. They are: i) structure: physical and organisational; ii) attitude: beliefs, feelings, emotions; iii) pedagogy: philosophies, approaches, curriculum; and iv) process: leadership and facilitation, procedural.

Constraints evident at the end of cycle four were dominated by structure, attitude and pedagogy factors, including an anomaly between the school's enrolment policy and practices and the lack of alignment between curriculum frameworks. Penny spoke about the anomaly between the school's enrolment policy and practice *If their policy was 'well we won't take them unless they're five by the beginning of the school year', we [the BBPLC] wouldn't be having this debate.*

Preschool teachers noted conflicting pressures from parents wanting their children to start as soon as they were eligible (four and half years) and some schoolteachers recommending additional time in preschool. A persistent pedagogic constraint across both sectors is evidenced as different expectations and cultures regarding children's level of choice, reflecting philosophical discontinuity. Enabling factors most prominent at the end of cycle four were attitude, pedagogy and process, evidenced as deeper respect for and understanding of practices and conditions. Enabling processes included the contribution made by a critical friend/facilitator to the BBPLC meetings, the communicative space within the BBPLC and the negotiation process of a transition statement document.

Table 5.2 shows that change from cycle one to cycle four was most prominent in attitude factors. Participants linked a shift from defensive attitudes to more empathetic views with on-going

personal and professional contact between the teachers. Penny explained: *Another eye-opening moment, I was looking at them and listening to these teachers and I'm thinking 'You know what. You're feeling exactly the same.' I felt a sense of sisterhood with her.*

Table 5.2. Constraining and enabling factors identified by participants.

	Structure		Attitude		Pedagogy		Process	
	C1	C4	C1	C4	C1	C4	C1	C4
Constraining								
Preschool sector	1	1	8	2	5	3	0	1
School sector	3	4	2	5	4	5	1	2
Overall change	4	5	10	7	9	8	1	3
Enabling								
Preschool sector	0	1	4	10	6	7	1	4
School sector	1	3	4	4	1	4	0	5
Overall change	1	4	8	14	7	11	1	9

By cycle four, pedagogical constraints reflect comparisons between local preschool programmes, replacing earlier comparisons between sectors. At each cycle these comparisons revealed a cautious and at times defensive philosophical position. Kate commented: *I don't think they wanted us to tell them what to do and we didn't want to be, have things imposed on us either.* All enabling factors increased, particularly process enablers. The sharp increases in process enablers related particularly to the space afforded by the BBPLC to negate power issues, engage in robust debate and critical reflection, negotiate shared understandings and collaborate on the design of the policies (for example transition statements) that changed practices. Peta explained: *I've really enjoyed being involved... having these conversations and listening to different perspectives ... it's really increased my awareness of things and what I do in my setting because through these conversations you are reflecting and describing what you do.* The increase in structural enablers was related to the affordance of time to engage in the activities of the BBPLC, yet there was little change in structural constraints related to enrolment policy, starting age and curriculum. A marked increase in attitude

enablers, particularly in the preschool sector, arose from the sense of successful negotiation, pride in achievements and increased respect and empathy for each other.

In summary, the key enabling factors to emerge from these conversations were positive attitudes, enhanced pedagogic understanding and the BBPLC processes. Key constraining factors focused on policy context and philosophical discontinuity reflecting deep-seated and historical artefacts of a split system.

How might cross-sectorial professional relationship facilitate the negotiation of shared understandings to support continuity during transitions to school?

Literature constructions of continuity and the theoretical perspectives informing them were assigned as category codes, and examined for links with relational concepts. The codes are: i) developmental: readiness, hierarchical; ii) ecological: contextual connections, seamlessness; iii) sociocultural: stakeholder interactions, reciprocity, and iv) critical: transformative, negotiated, contextual.

Table 5.3. Constructions of continuity identified by participants.

	Developmental		Ecological		Sociocultural		Critical	
	C1	C4	C1	C4	C1	C4	C1	C4
Preschool sector	7	4	7	5	0	2	0	8
School sector	6	1	6	7	6	8	4	4
Overall change	13	5	13	12	6	10	4	12

Table 5.3 shows that by cycle four, critical, ecological and sociocultural perspectives dominated, and five of six participants expressed critical constructions of continuity as a long-term process of supported personalised change. Establishing shared understandings about continuity informed by critical perspectives meant teachers could accept and acknowledge differences between their ‘two worlds’ and then collaboratively develop transitions strategies relevant to a range of stakeholders. Paula commented that it is ...*good to be different and to understand how each sector is operating and to respect that but not necessarily blend together to be the same because that*

would be boring for the children. The process of change involved deep and sometimes difficult debate: *And when it came to the crunch when we talked about transitional activities, that was a powerful moment... You actually have to go through a little bit of pain to grow, and that was such a huge growth moment* (Kate). Spending time in others' learning environments, reflecting, engaging in robust debates, and negotiating the design of a succinct and meaningful transition statement were mentioned as key experiences influencing the formation of more critical constructions of transitions and continuity.

Ecological views of continuity varied from the application of teachers' knowledge about contextual differences to helping children adjust to change, but seamlessness across sectors was rejected because of policy gaps, pedagogical and philosophical differences, and limited knowledge about others' curriculum frameworks and assessment practices. Kris noted the following: *Talking about linking curriculum documents, it's something we do need to know more about, maybe that's where the system needs to put some energy. You know if we hadn't been doing this project, no one would have given us that document.* Partnerships supported sociological constructions of continuity as teacher-child and teacher-parent relationships-building during transitions. Kate commented: *We need to see what's going help to the parent's transition to primary school. Because we're not transitioning just the child, we're transitioning the whole family. Preschools do that really well because they transition families into the setting, they're always talking about the family.* This perspective on continuity emerged through personal interactions over time, and was reflected in comments such as: *It's like you're on a journey in regards to getting to know the children that will be coming to you and building relationships. I think what we have put in place has really helped with the transition of children. We're meeting them where they're at in regards to learning* (Karen). By cycle four, few developmental constructions of continuity as readiness were expressed, as teachers moved towards sharing broader understandings of children before and after school entry that supported more personalized transitions and reflect critical constructions of continuity.

As relationship concepts shifted, a marked change from cycle one to cycle four was noted with movement away from developmental perspectives emphasising orientation and readiness towards a broad range of perspectives on continuity during transition. Karen observed, *Understanding what transition is to orientation, I used to put those two words under the same umbrella. Now I know what orientation means and I know what transition means, you know orientation is just a small part of the transition.* Initial constructions of continuity as ‘readiness’ shifted to conversations about supporting children and their families during a longer-term process through which gradual understandings of differences in settings, expectations and people could be formed. Peta explained, *I think I understand how I probably need to help children transition into that school in terms of their understanding.* The planning, range and time period across which transitions activities were undertaken changed from school-planned short-term orientation events to a long-term, co-developed sequence of shared activities including visits of children and teachers across the settings. There was also a shift in the language used by teachers in both sectors from hierarchical terminology (going up to school, down to preschool) to parallel terms (across, over), reflecting more equitable constructions of continuity.

In summary, while readiness views continued to be expressed, continuity constructions attended more to supporting children’s awareness of change as they commenced school, long-term shared transitions activities, enhanced schoolteacher interactions with children and families, and more personalized transitions. The participants engaged in professional learning, respected difference, and established the shared understanding that transition practices and conditions do not have to yield to another to effect continuity.

Discussion

The interweaving of relationship concepts, enablers and transitions continuity in the extant literature indicated that interactions between these elements might not be direct or linear. Our data indicate that interactions were complex and dynamic, and that multiple connected elements contributed to

the transformative changes to practices, understandings and conditions (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014). Each is discussed in turn.

Transformative change of practice was evident in a shift from short-term orientation events and school-like readiness activities towards longer-term shared transitions activities such as regular visits across settings. Changed practices were framed by shared understandings of the importance of prior learning and sustained interaction across settings (Petriwskyj 2013, Einarsdottir, Perry and Dockett 2008). The co-construction of a transition statement that linked learning across the sectors required the teachers to engage in robust conversations and professional learning in order to reach unforced consensus on the design of the statement. Developing transitions policies reflects a commitment to sustainability and personalisation of transition pedagogies framed by deeper understanding of children and families. The BBPLC provided a communicative space to examine practices, to consider cross-sectorial perspectives and to reflect on possibilities for more rational and sustainable practice. In the context of this study the provision of such a space is not common, yet it was critical to the development of mutual understandings of others' points of view. It became a space where differences were strengths or sources of deeper learning, rather than deficits or compromises.

Negotiating shared understandings is reliant on the premise that they must be reached through unforced consensus. This emerged in this study when the group reflected on a chapter written by Dunlop (2007, 165) in which she states 'The two worlds of preschool and school are both important, and have identities that should not be lost, a bridge between them is important, a recognisable landscape on each side of the gap helps'. From this point, conversations were freed of suspicion about forced change in the form of schoolification or preschoolification (Moss 2008). Having different agendas was seen as an opportunity to reframe practice architectures (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014) informing transitions. Recognising difference as a strength and acknowledging the importance of having an understanding not only of the terrain on either side of

the bridge, but also how it was formed is consistent with the concept of relationships as a meeting place where new and shared understandings can be co-constructed (Moss 2013).

Closely examining understandings of practices may not necessarily lead to the negotiation of shared understandings, as evidenced in this study with respect to the school's enrolment practices and policy. This unresolved matter represents a barrier (Henderson 2012) and potential source of tension or threat to the negotiation of understandings that support rational and sustainable practices. However, as Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014, 36) note, 'because communicative action opens up this respectful space between people, participating in communicative action builds solidarity between participants, and underwrites their understandings and decisions'. Solidarity, evidenced as a 'sisterhood', has been exhibited in the BBPLC and represents an encouraging enabling factor for future negotiations.

Consistent with Peters' (2014) insights, the teachers in this study noted the value of classroom visits in developing deepening understandings of conditions that inform transition practice in each sector. Hopps' (2004, 8) earlier observation that interpersonal cross-sectorial interaction 'does not happen very often or very well' highlights the paucity of opportunities for cross-sectorial professional dialogue, as there are no systemic policies that mandate or fund cross-sectorial interactions in most Australian state jurisdictions. Bi-directional system linkages that develop cross-sectorial professional relationships to improve transitions make sense (Dockett and Perry 2007) but require change in policy and funding conditions.

While leadership, researching with teachers, making practice more visible and the formation of a professional learning community have been identified earlier as process enablers of deeper transitions relationships (Arnup 2014; Dunlop 2007; Henderson 2012), this study identified further factors: the external facilitation of debate, the protocols guiding operation of the BBPLC, and the process of developing the shared transitions statements. In these conditions, the members of the BBPLC were empowered to interrogate long-held systems beliefs about transitions, and in doing so they transformed several transitions understandings and practices. Achieving this transformation

required a relationship and a space that enabled these teachers to break through professional barriers and hierarchical concepts of cross-sectorial professional relationships (Henderson 2012; Moss 2013). Recognition of a ‘better professional relationship’ signifies a shift in conceptual framing of possibilities for cross-sectorial relationships that negate the power differentials that exist between systems (Moss 2008) and recognise both worlds as being valuable (Dunlop 2007).

Conclusion

Adopting a critical participatory action research methodology, we have captured the conversations of teachers about cross-sectorial professional relationships to extend the emerging body of literature reporting critical approaches to transitions to school. Through this study we have learnt that teachers hold a range of concepts of cross-sectorial professional relationships and that relationships frame possibilities for continuity during transitions to school. The study indicated that various factors constrain or enable the development of these relationships and that some, though not all of these can be changed or reframed through sustained professional interactions and dialogue. Since context matters, the conditions that facilitated changes to understandings and practices for this group of teachers may not be suited to other professional communities. This study might, however, encourage others to consider innovative relational processes as an opportunity for change and critical participatory action research as a methodology to investigate transitions to school. Finally, the evidence prompts action at a policy level to invest in teachers as transitions capital, since strategies such as the BBPLC reported in this paper require funding to afford teachers the time to establish and engage in cross-sectorial professional meeting places.

Chapter 6: Policy Continuity

This chapter presents empirical evidence of *policy continuity*, one of the three new directions for the field identified in the integrative literature review presented in Chapter 2 (i.e., Boyle, Grieshaber, & Petriwskyj, 2018). Responding to an invitation extended to the second author (Grieshaber) by the editor (Professor Rupert McLean), the book *Life in classrooms: Past, present and future* was selected as the target publication. Conceived as a Festschrift honouring of the life work of Professor Maurice Galton, the book examines teachers' work with particular reference to the way policymaking and research interact to shape educational practices. The 690-page volume has 40 chapters authored by an array of international scholars. Article C (Boyle and Grieshaber, 2017) acknowledges research undertaken by Galton and colleagues investigating transitions, continuities and discontinuities, and extends the context of this work to investigate the interaction of policies and practices in the early years.

As detailed in the integrative literature review presented in Chapter 2, policy concepts associated with transitions to school are predominantly understood as “context specific documents focused on preparation for school” (Boyle, Grieshaber, & Petriwskyj, 2018, p. 174). Findings of the review also noted that while there has been a shift from universal systemic policies to more contextual, process-orientated policies, there remains little evidence²¹ in the Australian context of transitions to school policies that mandate practices linking learning across the sectors. The absence of policy continuity was identified by the members of the Building Bridges Professional Learning Community (BBPLC), who acknowledged they had very little knowledge or understanding of policies guiding practices in each other's settings. In this study practices associated with gathering information about children transitioning to school in order to link learning across the sectors, were identified as a source of tension and a shared concern (Habermas, 1984, 1987). This article reports how the actions undertaken by the BBPLC in response to this concern, specifically the design and

²¹ One notable exception being the Victorian Early Years Learning & Development Framework (Department of Education and Training, 2009)

development of co-constructed cross-sectorial transition statements, worked to establish a shared language of and understandings about transitions practices.

At the time this article²² was written, the theory-method package employed to zoom in and out (Nicolini, 2012) on the practices of the BBPLC was informed by the theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984; 1987) and participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998, 2003, 2005). The other three elements of the theory-method package detailed in Chapter 3 were not yet part of the conceptualisation of the thesis. Consequently, this article reports how the conditions for ideal speech, afforded by the opening of a communicative space (BBPLC), facilitated the negotiation of intersubjective agreement to establish shared understandings in order to reach unforced consensus about what to do in a particular situation (Habermas, 1984, 1987, Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003, 2005).

The research reported in this chapter has also been disseminated at the following conferences and seminars:

Boyle, T. (2013, September). *Transition to school: Continuity and pedagogy*. Invited presentation to the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong.

Boyle, T. (2013, September). *Investigating transition to school through participatory action research*. Paper presented at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) Conference. Tallinn, Estonia

Boyle, T. & Grieshaber, S. (2014, September). *Linking learning: Developing cross-sector policies for transition*. Paper presented at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) Conference. Crete, Greece.

Boyle, T. (2014, December). *Building Bridges Transitions to School Project Report*. Invited presentation to the Education Services Team. Catholic Schools Office. Lismore, NSW, Australia.

²² This was the first of the three findings articles to be written and submitted for publication.

Article C

Boyle, T. & Grieshaber, S. (2017). Linking learning: Developing cross-sector policies for transitions to school. In R. Maclean (Ed.), *Life in classrooms: Past, present and future* (pp. 369 – 384). Singapore: Springer. doi 10.1007/978-981-10-3654-5

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Linking learning: Developing cross-sector policies for transitions to school²³

Abstract

This chapter presents data from a teacher participatory action research project about transition between the year before compulsory schooling and the first year of schooling in the state of New South Wales, Australia. The participants include four teachers (two from each sector) and four executive staff, all of whom are supported by the education authority through the provision of release time to engage in a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The project aims to enhance understanding from both the compulsory and pre-compulsory sectors by enabling participants to identify areas of convergence and divergence, specifically curriculum and pedagogy. The ultimate goal is to improve transitions for children from preschool to the first year of school by developing transitions statements that link learning from one educational setting to the other. The chapter analyses data from individual interviews and meetings of the professional learning community. It makes a case for the way in which cross-sector policy development might occur so as to move toward the aim of improving transitions for children.

Keywords: critical theory; participatory action research; policy development; professional learning community; transitions to school

Introduction

The Australian education system is currently undergoing major reform in the compulsory and pre-compulsory sectors. Amongst other things, these reforms include a national curriculum, assessment and reporting framework for the compulsory sector called the *Australian Curriculum* (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2012) and a nationally mandated learning framework from birth to 5 years titled *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (the Framework) (Department of Education, Employment and

²³ Text is consistent with the book guidelines: Chicago AD reference style and UK spelling.

Workplace Relations [DEEWR] 2009). Despite this, the structural context of the education system is differentiated across the six states and two territories. Thus, Australian state and territory governments hold authority for the organisation of education in the pre-compulsory and compulsory sectors and of their respective workforces. So, while federal investments and initiatives such as the development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum have been agreed upon by the states and territories through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (2009), the Australian Curriculum is open to interpretation and modification. The complex and varied structural contexts of the Australian education system present particular challenges to the development of policy.

The importance of continuity between prior-to-school and school sectors is emphasised within recent policy documents, which are guided by the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA] 2008). According to Connor (2012), educators now have ‘golden opportunities’ (p. 3) for establishing continuity between the sectors. Yet in the state of New South Wales, the site of the study reported in this chapter, there is no mandate for the sectors to engage with each other or their respective policies. The absence of policy to assist teachers to implement transition programs that enhance continuity is anomalous with the body of transition research and social policy initiatives that confirm the importance of continuity.

While the recently released Australian Curriculum (ACARA 2012) and the Framework (DEEWR 2009) do not provide explicit links across the pre-compulsory and compulsory sectors, they do encourage discussion of continuity and alignment. The Framework supports curriculum decision making ‘to extend and enrich children’s learning from birth to five years and through transition to school’ (DEEWR 2009, p. 5). This inaugural federal policy endorses play-based pedagogies, including intentional teaching and outcomes-based assessment. In doing so it presents challenges and opportunities to well-established practice in this sector, including continuity during transition (Grieshaber 2010). In the compulsory sector, the Australian Curriculum mandates curriculum content and a standards-based approach to assessment, but does not endorse any

particular pedagogical framework. Both policies recommend teachers align curriculum and pedagogy across the sectors to enhance continuity during transition. However, there is no mandate at a federal level for either sector, and little evidence of support, to date, to achieve this (Barblett, Barratt-Pugh, Kilgallon and Maloney 2011). The introduction of these policy documents provides teachers in both sectors with more consistent touchstones upon which to consider transition. For the first time, teachers in the school sector have the opportunity of linking planning with a Framework (DEEWR 2009) that provides a consistent set of outcomes and principles. In the state of New South Wales (NSW) the organisation of the education system and workforce is split across the pre-compulsory and compulsory sectors, and different authorities hold governance of curriculum, student assessment, and teacher quality (education and accreditation) in each sector. This has resulted in teachers having limited engagement with cross-sector policies guiding practice.

Transitions literature

The term ‘transitions to school’ has been defined in many ways and from many different perspectives. For the purposes of this chapter it is identified as ‘the process of moving from one setting to another, often accompanied by a move from one phase of education to another’ (Fabian 2007, p. 6). The importance of making a positive start to school has been researched extensively and linked to later success in life by Galton and many others (Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani 1998; Bohan-Baker and Little 2002; Dockett Perry and Kearney 2012; Galton and Hargreaves 2002; Pianta and Kraft-Sayre 2003). Findings confirm that the greater the alignment between the sectors, the fewer problems children face during transition (Barblett and Maloney 2010; Brostrom, 2005). Achieving alignment in Australian states and territories is made more challenging by the historical development of the pre-compulsory and compulsory sectors (Wong 2007). This challenge is exacerbated by the legacy of philosophical and pedagogical differences (King 2011). In recent years, the pedagogical divide has widened as play-based activities in the compulsory sector of some Australian states have declined (Boyle and Grieshaber 2013). While relationships between the pre-compulsory and compulsory sectors vary across and within states, such relationships are influenced

by theoretical perspectives that inform research about transition to school, specifically maturational, ecological and sociocultural theories. Critical theory informs the research discussed in this chapter, but little research about transition has adopted this perspective.

The relationship between the pre-compulsory and compulsory sector is evident in the transitions literature, notably that which addresses school readiness. Child developmental theory regards childhood as a period of natural and universal growth and maturation, a state of becoming (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead 2008). While adults may prompt or nurture maturation, development is portrayed as an interactive endeavour. Maturational perspectives view the relationship between the sectors through a lens of readiness, where children are measured against norms of social, emotional and cognitive skills that have been clustered into stages. Transitions to school are constructed as the movement from one stage to another and as a linear and hierarchical process (Corsaro 2011). The relationship between the pre-compulsory and compulsory sector is represented as ‘senders and receivers’, and the role of the former sector is to prepare children for progression to the latter (Moss 2013). Power and authority are incrementally attributed in this hierarchal structure with the before-school sector positioned at the bottom of the ladder (Moss 2013). This division is reflected in the use of language such as pre-school and big-school (Petriwskyj and Grieshaber 2011).

From an ecological theoretical perspective, the concept of readiness acknowledges the interrelated influences of home, school, peers and neighbourhood (Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta, 2000). The relationship between the sectors is constructed as a ‘partnership’ as the provision of support for children and their families combines the resources of all these influences. ‘Ready’ children are considered to demonstrate specific skills and dispositions: ‘physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development and cognition and general knowledge’ (Emig, Moore and Scarupa 2000, pp. 3 – 4). Ecological perspectives adopt the position that children can be made ‘more ready’ to start school by participating in programs that support the development of skills and dispositions required to do well

at school. Such programs typically deliver a play-based integrated curriculum that addresses key domains (standards) of readiness, against which children are assessed (Office of Head Start 2012). The relationship between the sectors from this perspective is seen as more collaborative, dynamic and bidirectional (Dockett and Perry 2007).

Sociocultural theories of transitions emphasise the importance of multilayered relationships and suggest children acquire cultural collateral through active and passive participation. Alignment of the cultures between the child's home, school and community during transitions can enhance continuity or highlight discontinuity as their prior experiences prepare or prime them for this significant change event (Corsaro 2011; Rogoff 2003). Attempts to achieve alignment are evident in preparatory or priming events (Corsaro 2011) such as long-term transitions programs that provide opportunities for respectful and reciprocal relationships between all stakeholders (Chan 2009). Respect can be demonstrated through multidirectional collaborations such as reaching out to communities in preference to school-specified events and agendas (Dockett and Perry 2009). The *Starting Strong I* Report (OECD 2001) supports this approach and advises that relationships based on a partnership model should not only be strong but equal. The achievability of such a partnership has been questioned by Moss (2013), who suggests that the culture of the dominant context is likely to be positioned as having more power.

Perspectives of transitions informed by critical theory are represented in a small yet emerging body of literature. Critical perspectives of transitions offer opportunities for the pre-compulsory and compulsory sector to consider how current practices include or exclude the voices of stakeholders, and in doing so offer more respectful and balanced approaches to power dynamics (Petriwskyj and Grieshaber 2011). A critical approach to transitions requires cross-sectorial perspectives that interrupt stereotypes of readiness and homogeneity, and to challenge the assumed consensus (Grieshaber 2008). Binary constructions of readiness that measure children against norms and standards which render them either 'ready' or 'not ready' perpetuate unidirectional approaches to transitions that privilege the compulsory sector (Moss 2013).

Theoretical Perspective and Methodology

This study is informed by the theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984, 1987) and models of participatory action research (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart 2003). The theory of communicative competence (Habermas 1984) provides a framework by which the relationship between theory and practice can be mediated, by opening communicative spaces in which ideal speech situations can be facilitated. Communicative action requires participants to reach intersubjective agreement as a basis for mutual understanding, so as to reach an unforced consensus about what to do in a particular situation (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005). This opens communicative spaces for the development of relationships where norms are negotiated that seek to ensure all participants have an equal voice and rights (Habermas 1984). The idea is for individual participants to negotiate a response to the issue being investigated (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). This process is consistent with the form of participatory action research adopted in this study and requires participants to think critically (dialectically) about pedagogy and the key concepts of transitions. Participants created and engaged in what turned out to be a collective, collaborative, self-reflexive, and critical professional learning community (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker and Many 2012). Participants were encouraged to examine their own knowledge about transitions, to reflect critically on how this knowledge impacts their daily actions, and to work toward improving interactions across the sectors.

Methods: Participants, data collection and analysis

Purposive sampling (Creswell 2012) was used to intentionally select a context within the jurisdiction that co-locates school and prior-to-school services on the same site. The participants are representative of both sectors, participated in the pilot study and were enthusiastic to continue involvement. They include four teachers; two from the pre-school room in a long day care centre (Penny and Peta) and two from the kindergarten room in a primary school (Kelly and Kris). Four executive staff were also involved: the Director of the long day care centre (Paula), the Principal (Kevin) and Assistant Principal (Kate) of the primary school and the Assistant Director (David) of

the systemic authority within the region in which the site is located. All participants are either directly or indirectly involved in transitions practice and policy and been identified using pseudonyms.

Although survey questionnaires were used, data²⁴ reported in this chapter are drawn from the PLC²⁵ meeting notes and semi-structured interviews (Kvale 2007). Participants meet together in the PLC to plan, reflect, critique and collaborate. Teachers are released from teaching commitments to attend these one-day (9am - 3pm) meetings. Following the format of the pilot study (Boyle 2012), the meetings follow an agreed agenda, which is distributed to participants for consideration prior to the meeting date. The conversations are recorded and transcribed, and whiteboard summaries are photographed. The meeting notes and summaries record details of activities undertaken in each (action research) cycle, and inform the negotiated action plan. The negotiated action plan is circulated to participants for confirmation of accuracy after the meetings. The meeting notes and photographic summaries are available for participants to access electronically if required. Key actions (professional learning, transition activities, teacher exchanges and future planning) are noted within the action plan.

The semi-structured interviews offered participants an opportunity to share their lived experiences (Flick 2009) of transitions in a one-on-one situation, providing a communicative space not afforded in the group PLC situation and one where contentious or dissenting views could be expressed in confidence. The interviews occurred in Cycle 1 2013, after the first PLC meeting of the year. Interview questions were informed by an online survey and data from the first PLC meeting. Each participant was asked five generic questions and two questions drawn from data that related specifically to issues raised or comments made by them in the PLC. The interviews lasted between 40 and 120 minutes and were scheduled at times and locations that suited participants. All

²⁴ This chapter was written prior to the decision to use the term evidence.

²⁵ Also referred to in this thesis as the BBPLC.

were audio recorded and transcribed fully. Participant validation (Kvale, 2007) was undertaken by providing each participant with a copy of the transcribed interview to check and amend if required.

During the first phase of data analysis all data were descriptively coded (Saldāna 2009), collated into a table and analytic memos written. Recurring codes within the data corpus (including memos) were colour coded and frequency noted. The second phase involved ‘clumping’ the codes into categories (Gibbs 2007). At the end of this phase five key categories had emerged (design, implementation, dialogue, networks, professional learning), each with five sub-categories. Data were then pattern coded (Miles and Huberman, 1994), revealing three emergent themes (relationships, shared understandings, change). One topic that reflected these three emergent themes was what could broadly be called assessment. In what follows, we provide an analysis of key events related to assessment that shows how relationships and shared understandings about assessment in both contexts were developed, and how the development of transitions statements occurred as a result of this.

Findings: Relationships, Shared understandings and Transformative Change

Following the pilot study, the participants chose to continue involvement in the Professional Learning Community (PLC). Within this space they agreed to resume strengthening cross-sectorial relationships and the negotiation of differences with a view to creating new understanding, thinking and practices. At the first meeting of the PLC in 2013, the group negotiated four goals, one of which was ‘To define and develop transitions statements’ (PLC Meeting Notes, 7 March 2013). This aspiration reflects the intention to negotiate shared understandings about the way information about children commencing school is ‘sent and received’, with a view to making transformative changes to policy and practice. From the data related to the development of transition statements, we identified three actions undertaken by the PLC which were fundamental in the process: negotiating understandings and relationships; reviewing the assessment of children’s readiness for school; and teacher professional learning about approaches to assessment. We discuss each to provide an analysis of how these actions produced shared understandings, which in turn

strengthened relationships amongst members of the PLC and resulted in changes to practice and policy. The teachers in the first year of compulsory school teaching children aged 4.5 – 6 years are referred to as kindergarten teachers and those in the before school sector teaching children aged 4 – 5 years are referred to as preschool teachers.

Negotiating understandings and relationships

Despite that fact that the school and long day care centre are co-located, prior to the PLC, movement between the sites had been limited to a few activities designed to orientate the children to school. This is consistent with Galton's (2000) investigation, who noted that 'teachers are often reluctant to engage in forms of collaboration with colleagues ... unless evidence exists that the colleague's view on practice is similar' (p. 200). The participants recognised that they had very little knowledge about or understanding of each other's settings, or of the policies that guide their practices. Kate (assistant principal), talked about the importance of 'understanding ... where these kids have come from':

You know Karen [kindergarten teacher] hadn't really been to a preschool to see them in action until last year. And she's been teaching kindergarten for most of her career. I think [it's important] if you've got an understanding of where these kids have come from in terms of their space, so where they live in their preschool. (Kate; Interview, 6 May 2013)

Here Kate recognised one of the key differences of the two systems (space and how it is used), and that up until the initiation of the PLC, opportunities to build relationships and negotiate shared understandings of the two worlds children traverse during transitions had been limited. This is consistent with the findings of Hopps (2004) who noted that communication between the sectors in the state of New South Wales 'does not occur very often or very well' (p. 8). Observation of and discussions about differences in practice and policy were noted as participants visited classrooms across the sites. The children also engaged in regular exchanges which provided them and their teachers with more opportunities to observe difference, and for teachers to further discuss difference in the forum of the PLC.

Systemic differences were often raised as the source of significant divergence. These included structural dissimilarities such as the physical environment, however, it was contemplations of practice, in particular the philosophies that inform practice, that resulted in the most robust conversations. Different theoretical perspectives underpinning the philosophies held by teachers within each sector are evident in practice and in policy. In her interview, Paula (preschool director) talked about ‘holding firm to our own philosophies of early childhood’ (Interview, 24 April 2013). This comment was made in defense of the centre’s programme, which, in comparison to that of another local preschool, was perceived as being less structured, less like school. In this conversation, Paula confirmed her conviction of resisting the push-down of more formal approaches to education into preschool. This phenomenon is identified in the Starting Strong II Report (OECD, 2006) as the ‘schoolification’ (p. 62) of the sector. The participants also identified the tension between philosophical understandings of pedagogy and readiness reflected in this global phenomenon. The preschool programme was seen by Kelly, a kindergarten teacher, as requiring firmer expectations to help prepare children for school, such as completing “the activity before they actually move on” (Interview, 6 May 2013). Alternatively, the kindergarten programme at the school was identified by Penny, a preschool teacher, as being very different because of the regulation and the speed with which children change their behaviour:

...it never ceases to amaze me how they can so quickly get these little armies of children in groups that march from one thing to another. It was halfway through first term and they were like these little robotic things...I could never teach like that, I couldn’t make myself do it. (Interview, 24 April 2013)

Preschool teachers had little knowledge about or understanding of the historical, theoretical and systemic conventions informing programmes in the school sector, and vice versa. It became an objective of the group (also articulated as a goal) to know more about the differences and how they might establish shared understandings. Within the PLC such understandings were negotiated through a professional learning workshop, presented by representatives of each sector with explanations about the philosophies informing their respective pedagogies and curriculum. In the

time available, differences in systemic policies and demands were acknowledged and understood as the basis of changes to practice within both sectors (PLC Meeting Notes, 23 October 2013).

Recognition of difference and being prepared to engage in cross-sectoral dialogue led this group of teachers to navigate differences; to accept reasons for these, including that they are immutable; and to find ways to build connections between the two sectors in order to assist children transitioning from one to the other. The following comment from Kris reflects the positive tone of the PLC and the motivation of members to work with commonalities.

We're understanding the two settings and the expectations of the two settings and yes, there are lots of differences but there are also commonalties [and] where we can build on those commonalties for the children to help them make that big step from the preschool setting to school. There's lots of things that can still happen and we can further develop. (Kris, kindergarten teacher; PLC Meeting Notes, 19 September 2013)

During the second PLC meeting the group read and discussed a chapter by Dunlop (2007) in which she states, 'The two worlds of preschool and school are both important, and have identities that should not be lost, the bridge between them is important, a recognisable landscape on each side of the gap helps' (p. 165). This statement formed the platform on which participants came to the shared understanding that alignment or continuity between their two worlds did not mean yielding ground or trading philosophical standpoints. Rather, it required learning about the landscape on either side, and the negotiation of shared understandings if the goal of writing transition statements, a major change, was to be achieved. Continuity is presented as a desirable attribute of transitions yet empirical evidence shows that children are excited about the change transitions afford (Galton, Gray and Ruddock 2003).

Establishing a space in which a relationship of respect and open dialogue about difference has been created (see Habermas, 1984) enabled these teachers to engage with long held practices, assumptions and beliefs about transitions to school. Gathering information about children commencing school was one practice that was reviewed in the quest to develop the transitions statements.

Reviewing assessment of children's readiness for school

In the March 2013 PLC meeting, talking about linking learning led the group to discuss and reflect on current transitions practices, including the “Ready for School” checklist. The checklist is a document developed by the kindergarten teachers that sets out specifications or indicators of readiness under the headings Literacy, Numeracy, Social, Emotional, and Fine/Gross Motor Skills. Until 2012, it had been used by the school to gather information about children enrolling and was completed by the kindergarten teachers based on information provided by the preschool teachers when they met in the August prior to the children beginning school in January. It is informed by a maturational approach because it measures children against norms of social, emotional and cognitive skills that are clustered into stages (Katz 2010). Discussion of the checklist in the PLC revealed significant differences in philosophical approaches about the information that preschool teachers wanted to share with the kindergarten teachers, and the information required by the kindergarten teachers:

In the past two years or so they [kindergarten teachers] have...come in with a much more prescriptive list...can they write their name, can they count to five, do they know colours and I'm....thinking well, yes...but I'm not looking simply at those sorts of things...I don't like that, I don't like it at all. I much preferred when I would talk and they would make notes because I would talk about things like revealing some personalities... (Penny, preschool teacher; Interview, 24 April 2013)

Preschool teacher Penny sees information such as children's personalities as important, yet she understands the kindergarten teachers to be interested mostly in what might be called academic skills such as children being able to write their name, know colours and count. This excerpt provides an example of the unidirectional nature of recent practice, the contrast in concepts of readiness, and the divergence in how learning is understood. These illustrations are consistent with research by Dockett and Perry (2007) and Timperley et.al. (2003) that shows a scarcity of knowledge of the other, and a dearth of communication between the two educational contexts, which in turn produces different expectations. The changes in the school's information gathering activities over the past couple of years (referred to by Penny) are reflective of a move in the school

sector to a standard-based approach to assessment. For example, in New South Wales, teachers use the Best Start Kindergarten Assessment (New South Wales Department of Education and Communities 2013), a standardised measure to assess entry-level literacy and numeracy skills of the children commencing kindergarten. This assessment is typically undertaken before children commence classes in January or in the first few weeks of the first school term. The unidirectional and hierarchical nature of the approach adopted by the school in taking sole responsibility for deciding what information is gathered highlights an existing tension between the settings, and the potential of this assessment artefact to destabilise relationships established within the PLC.

While the preschool teachers appreciated the fact that the kindergarten teachers took the time to talk with them about the children commencing school (others do not), they were troubled by the lack of alignment between the information required by the kindergarten teachers and the outcomes of the learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) with which they are required to work. The standards (expressed as indicators) on the Ready for School Checklist used by the kindergarten teachers, the decision to change the format of the checklist to include literacy and numeracy indicators, and the presumption that the preschool teachers would be able to provide evidence of children's progress against these exemplifies what has been called a 'readiness for school model' in which the school holds the authority (OECD 2006, p. 63). Discontinuity between the information required for the Ready for School Checklist and that of the five outcomes in the Framework (DEEWR 2009) began to emerge as a significant point of divergence and a potential 'road block' to the development of the transitions statements.

You know how there's been the suggestion of changing the...checklist...I'm not sure how that's going to pan out...the whole notion is great, but is it really going to tell them [kindergarten teachers] what they want to know about a child and their particular skills?... but they're talking can children count to 10, can children count to 20, can children recognise their own name, are they writing letters? How are we going to write that under an outcome when we're actually saying...for each individual child we're writing almost a narrative to say where they're at within that outcome. It's not 'checklisting' enough...I didn't know how they were going to actually get the

information they've got [to have] in their checklists. I don't know how they think they're going to get it out of some information under the EYLF [outcomes from the Framework]. (Paula, Preschool Director; Interview, 24 April, 2013)

In this excerpt, Paula stated explicitly the issue of the lack of alignment between the requirements of the school checklist and the outcomes of the Framework. Discussions about these differences informed the actions of a subsequent meeting by including a professional learning session about assessment, presented by teachers from each sector. The presentations about how learning is assessed in each sector proved to be a turning point in the development of shared understanding about assessment, which has since been reflected in the design of the transitions statements.

Teacher professional learning about approaches to assessment

The provocation of difference in the form of the Ready for School Checklist used by the school to gather information about children enrolling presented a challenge to the negotiation of shared understandings and to the established relationships within the PLC. The Ready for School Checklist reinforces the idea that transitioning to school is movement from one stage to another and a linear and hierarchical process (Corsaro 2011). If learning is to be linked across the sectors, in this case in the form of transitions statements, these differences needed to be identified and negotiated successfully. To enhance understanding of approaches to assessment, Paula (preschool director) presented about the prior-to-school sector and Kate (assistant principal) about the school sector. They both provided the group with an overview as well as details of the principles and processes of assessment.

What resulted was an understanding that the preschool teachers gather and document evidence of learning using the five outcomes statements in the Framework (DEEWR 2009). The evidence is based on observations of individual children and reported to parents as narratives (PLC Meeting Notes, 9 March 2013). The kindergarten teachers gather and document evidence of learning using standards based on cohort comparative assessments, and report to parents by comparing children against their cohort on a three-point scale ('at', 'above', 'towards'), which is

usually recorded as a profile that gives teachers and parents a visual overview of areas of strength and those requiring further attention. Consensus was reached that the differences in practice that caused consternation among participants were grounded in a paucity of understanding of the other (PLC Meeting Notes, 9 March 2013). Having agreed to use the outcomes of the Framework (DEEWR 2009) as the basis for the transition statement (PLC Meeting Notes, 7 March, 2013), the challenge was to include a profile (similar to what was used by the kindergarten teachers) that would facilitate comparison of the cohort. The inclusion of the profile was considered by the group to be an important design element because it provided a visual overview of children's strengths and areas that required further elaboration; a structure for large amounts of information to be presented succinctly, and it reflected the assessment practices of both sectors, which was a desirable attribute (PLC Meeting Notes, 27 June, 2013).

Reaching consensus about the eventual format required teachers from both sectors to challenge existing understanding and thinking, and to make concessions that included different perspectives: 'We've always gone and gathered information, we're just respectful of the fact that these are the outcomes you work towards and we would like to bring that more in line with how you work' (Kate, Assistant Principal. PLC Meeting Notes, 9 May, 2013). The eventual design was seen to be considerate of both sectors because it included the language of the Framework (DEEWR 2009) used by the preschool teachers, and the language of the profile used by the kindergarten teachers (PLC Meeting Notes, 23 October, 2013).

Towards the end of the process of developing the transitions statements, participants acknowledged a deeper understanding of the two sectors and of the need to gather information about children starting school that links learning through a bidirectional relationship.

I guess then it's all of those things that we can go forward with in relation to our profession and our understanding of education, from the early years through to school, a wonderful deeper understanding of how pedagogy and how pedagogical practices from the Early Years Learning Framework can marry together with, but is different to the pedagogy of curriculum based learning and teaching, and I would not have come to the knowledge or the beliefs that I currently do [have], as you put it Kate, saying it's now

become part of my conversations with parents and our educators in the centre, had I not had that opportunity to be part of this project and to have had that time to have those professional conversations. (Paula, Preschool Director. PLC Meeting Notes, 23 October, 2013)

Having established shared understandings about transitions, the practice of ‘gathering information’ was changed to reflect the bidirectional relationship between the two settings established within the PLC. The transitions statement, which has since replaced the checklist, includes evidence-based information about children’s prior knowledge according to the outcomes of the Framework (DEEWR 2009) in a succinct cohort comparative profile.

Conclusion: Changing Policy and Practice

The success of this ongoing PLC can be judged by the sustainability of the group, the outcomes achieved, and the continuing support of the jurisdiction. In terms of sustainability, the PLC will continue to meet in 2014 (without funding) to try and learn more about the other sector and develop further shared understandings. The PLC members will be also involved in developing transitions to school *policies* in an effort to ensure continuity of the practices that were established in 2013. These include changes to enrolment practices such as the transitions statements and meetings with parents, as well as long term transitions activities between the two sites such as regular visits to the library and events such as the Teddy Bears Picnic designed to bring the kindergarten and preschool children together. Attention to detail such as inserting the transitions activities into the diaries of the programmes for both settings for 2014 is reassuring in terms of commitment. It also suggests confidence in the practices to be enacted, and trust on the part of teachers in both settings. Thus, the outcomes achieved during 2012 (pilot study) and 2013 are being expanded in ways that will not only preserve continuity of practice, but will also foster opportunities for others in the jurisdiction to enrich their professional learning about transitions to school. The outcomes of 2013 are also being put to good use in terms of developing transitions to school policies, which will guide future transitions practices between the two sites involved in the PLC in 2013. In terms of broadening the scope of what has been achieved, a professional partnership project called Transitions to School

will be funded by the jurisdiction in 2014 and will include current PLC members, participants from one other school, and four other preschools (PLC Meeting Notes, 23 October, 2013). The focus of this professional partnership project will be sustaining the transitions practices developed in the PLC (e.g., opportunities for cross-sectoral professional learning), and wider adoption of the transitions statements, that is, to negotiate shared understandings about differences between the sectors and to negotiate mutually respectful transitions practices. These significant achievements in navigating the landscape of difference has enabled participants to change policy and practice beyond what is often called technical or means-to-end change (MacIntyre Latta and Kim 2010). Negotiating shared understandings has led to change that is ‘a part of who we are and how we act’ (Kelly, kindergarten teacher. PLC Meeting Notes, 23 October 2013). This comment from Kelly suggests that such change is likely to be enduring as it was not ‘top down’ and imposed from above. Participants in the PLC were ‘repositioned from receiver of knowledge to active participant in its creation’ (Taylor 2013, p. 10).

Our position is that through the development of shared understandings about the differences in their daily work and contexts, the nature of relationships amongst the preschool and kindergarten teachers and administrators changed. In turn, these remade relationships opened the possibility for a ‘makeover’ of practice and policy. The data suggest that the opportunity for developing greater understanding of the other has produced lasting and stable relationships because of the common goal of improving children’s experiences of transitions to school. Initiating practices such as teacher classroom exchanges (preschool and kindergarten), presentations about assessment in each sector, and the transitions curriculum at the beginning of the kindergarten year are examples of how participants enhanced their own understandings of transitions and continuity; and how transition and continuity operate in the respective settings in regard to philosophical, policy and systemic differences, and curriculum and assessment; and possibilities for how they might operate differently. In other words, participants developed shared understandings of these differences and why they exist, which paved the way for sustainable change in policy and practice. As part of the

PLC, participants talked about the concept of readiness, but the data suggest that shared understanding of this concept have not yet occurred.

Changes to policy occurred with the creation of transitions statements, which gather information from the preschool teachers about prior learning according to the Framework outcomes (DEEWR 2009). In addition, parent/child statements have been developed to ensure the information gathered includes the perspective of the child and their parents. While they are yet to be written, there is a commitment by staff in both sectors to write joint transitions policies recognising the importance of sustained transition practices. These will be endorsed by the administrators of both jurisdictions.

The data indicate that what was created in the PLC was similar to what Dahlberg and Lenz-Taguchi (1994, cited in Moss 2013) describe as a meeting place where cross-sectoral relationships can be formed and thrive. In developing these relationships, attention is paid to the significance of ‘the traditions of educational institutions and their workforces that find expression in values, social constructions, identities and practices’ (Moss 2013, p. 22). The relationship of a meeting place is ‘a close and productive relationship, avoiding the domination of one sector by the other, starts with co-constructing new and shared understandings’ (Moss 2013, p. 24). Recognition and acknowledgement of differences in traditions form the foundations for building such a relationship. The space of the PLC produced some deep insight about difference, including this from Kate: ‘We’ve come to some mighty realisations, acknowledging that it’s okay to be different, there are reasons why we’re different, and there’s research that supports the differences in the two settings’ (PLC Meeting Notes, 19 September, 2013). When transitioning from one setting to another, Galton et al. (2003) recommend considering a balance of the continuities and discontinuities change affords. But we leave the last word to David, the assistant director of the jurisdictional authority of the school, who came to a profound realisation about transitions and teachers:

The more and more I talk about this...transitions...it’s more about teachers than students. In the past we’ve put a lot of money into transitioning students...Wasted. Stuff happens but it’s effectively wasted. I think transitions is more about teachers

than it is about kids. So if you've got teachers talking to each other, like what has happened here, then you will help the transitions. (PLC Meeting Notes, 19 September, 2013)

Chapter 7: Practical Continuity

This chapter presents empirical evidence of *practical continuity*, the third and final new direction for the field identified in the integrative literature review presented in Chapter 2. The article presented in this chapter has been published in the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*. This journal was targeted because it lists as one of its aims a commitment to publish papers that contribute to debates on educational leadership. This publication adds to this debate by presenting an ontological perspective of the ways cross-sectorial leading practices can work to enhance continuity during transitions to school.

The article addresses a key challenge associated with professional continuity identified in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (2017) *Starting Strong V* report. Responding to an identified gap in the field, the article presents empirical evidence of the effects of leadership on transitions to school, conceptualised in this paper as leading practices. Key leading practices evidenced in the Building Bridges Professional Learning Community (BBPLC) were identified and analysed using the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer, & Bristol, 2014). Applying the ontological lens afforded by this theory, the paper departs from dominant discourses informed by epistemological perspectives that focus on universal constructions of transitions to school as events and/or processes. In doing so it makes a significant contribution to emerging discourses of transitions as continuities. The article addresses the research question by providing evidence of the capacity leading practices have to transform transitions to school practices and the conditions in which they are enacted. Indicators of impact are not yet available.

Article D.

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Two worlds, one site: Leading practices and transitions to school²⁶

Abstract

This paper presents an account of a cross-sectorial study investigating whether shared understandings of practices might enhance continuity during transitions to school. Applying an ontological lens to cross-sectorial leading practices, the paper sheds light on the contextualised realities of transitions to school as a site specific lived experience. The paper begins with an overview of the ways transitions to school practices are understood, including emerging perspectives of transitions as continuity practices. Then, cross sectorial concepts of leadership and leading are presented to highlight fundamental differences in the ways these practices are enacted across the sectors. The paper presents empirical evidence of the ways *leading practices* can work to establish shared understandings of transitions to school practices and policies. Given “little research has been done on the direct effects of leadership on transitions” (OECD 2017, 95) the paper contributes to emerging discourses that construct transitions to school as continuities.

Keywords: transitions to school; leading practices; practice architectures; continuity; site ontology

Introduction

The term ‘early years’ is understood as and applied internationally to the interval of life spanning birth to eight years (Kagan 2010). In many countries, including Australia, this period spans the pre-compulsory and compulsory school sectors which Dunlop (2007, 165) calls ‘two worlds’. These sectors have evolved from and continue to be shaped by different philosophical foundations which, over time, have resulted in different practice traditions (Kemmis et al. 2014). Differences between the two worlds, often identified as ‘discontinuities’ (Brostrom 2003), are most visible as children *transition to school* (Dockett and Perry 2013). Recent research into and commentary on transitions practices has evidenced a shift away from discourses of discontinuities to constructions of

²⁶ Text is consistent with the journal guidelines: Chicago AD reference style and UK spelling.

transitions as continuities (Boyle and Petrowskyj 2014; Boyle and Grieshaber 2017; Dockett and Einarsson, 2017; Dockett and Perry 2014a; Lillejord, Borge, Halvorsrud, Ruud and Freyr 2017). Though there is little consensus in the literature about what constitutes *continuity*, in this paper we understand the term to mean ‘experiences and learning that build on what has gone before’ (Dockett and Einarsson 2017, 133). The paper examines how *leading practices*, evidenced within a cross-sectorial project, worked to enhance continuity by establishing shared understandings of transition to school practices. Given ‘little research has been done on the direct effects of leadership on transitions’ (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2017, 95) the paper makes a contribution to emerging discourses of transitions as continuities. Following the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014) *practices* are understood as being situated and thus ontologically shaped and reshaped by site specific arrangements (conditions) found at or brought to the site. Applying an ontological lens to cross-sectorial leading practices sheds light on the contextualised realities (being) of transitions to school as a lived experience and makes a theoretical contribution to a field dominated by epistemological perspectives that focus on understandings (knowing about) transitions. Affirming the importance of contextual considerations of the sites in which transitions take place, Dockett and Einarsson (2017, 146) claim ‘strong and respectful cross-sector relationships generate the space for educators to share their expertise and to negotiate critical understandings of effective and appropriate practice across the transition to school’. However, there is a paucity of literature reporting empirical evidence of cross-sectorial collaborations negotiating critical understandings of transitions to school and fewer, if any, examining the ways leading practices may work to enable and/or constrain the generation of these spaces for shared understanding.

Transitions practices

Traditional perspectives of transitions practices informed by developmental understandings of maturation, evidenced as a series of hierarchical milestones, portray commencing school as a one-off change event (Boyle, Petrowskyj and Grieshaber 2018). Transitions practices informed by

developmental perspectives are largely concerned with readying children for school and orientating them to the school environment. Practices constructed as events typically include parent information meetings, enrolment assessments and interviews and children's visits to school (Early, Pianta, Taylor and Cox 2001). These practices conflate transitions to school with readiness, create binaries, emphasise sectorial discontinuities and assign responsibility to individual stakeholders (Clark 2017).

Transitions practices informed by ecological, socio-cultural and critical theoretical perspectives are characterised as long-term, iterative, multi-layered participatory processes involving a range of stakeholders (Boyle, Petriwskyj and Grieshaber 2018). Practices informed by these perspectives pay particular attention to context, relationships and support structures. These practices contest normative assumptions associated with readiness discourses preferring instead to promote discourses of continuity (Dockett and Perry 2014b). Responsibility for ensuring children make the best possible start to school informed by these perspectives are assigned to the collective of stakeholders, including families, schools, communities and services (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group 2011). Transitions practices, constructed as processes, typically include inter-disciplinary community based projects (Sarja, Poikonen and Nilsson 2012), long-term transitions programs (Hartley et al. 2012) and targeted interventions supporting children and families from diverse backgrounds (Sanagavarapu, 2010; Taylor 2011). Children's voices are valued and included (Recchia and Bently 2015), as are those of their parents (Petrakos and Lehrer 2011). Professional collaborations that seek to enhance continuity within and across the two worlds of early childhood are an emerging trend in transitions practices (Dockett and Einarsdottir 2017; Lillejord et al. 2017; Rantavouri 2018). Even though it is acknowledged that 'leadership is pivotal for supporting staff and teachers, and mak[ing] transitions work well for children' (OECD 2017, 95) there remains a lack of empirical evidence of the ways leadership and leading influence transitions.

Leadership and leading in the early years

Understanding how leadership and leading are conceptualised in the early years offers insights into the ways transitions practices are shaped by the sites in which they are enacted. In this section, we argue that reframing leadership as leading practices opens possibilities for new practices that have the capacity to overcome sectorial barriers by enhancing professional continuity.

The pre-compulsory sector

International research into leadership in the pre-compulsory sector (Heikka and Hujala 2013; Nicholson and Maniates 2016; O’Gorman and Hard 2013) reports a lack of clarity about what constitutes leadership and a lack of alignment between other models of leadership (e.g., schools) and early childhood philosophies (Murray and McDowall Clark 2013). The conflation of leadership with management and administrative tasks (Aubrey 2011; Sims et al. 2015), recency of attention to leadership within services (Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] 2017a) and lack of leadership training or professional development/support contribute to the contention that “early childhood practitioners are by and large reluctant leaders” (Heikka and Waniganayake 2011, 507). However, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart 2004) reports a link between effective leadership and the quality of programs offered by services. Acknowledging this connection, the Australian National Quality Framework [NQF] (ACECQA 2017b) now includes a clear focus on leadership defined as “a relationship between people and the best leaders are those who are able to empower others” (166). In addition, regulation 118 of the Australian Education and Care Services National Regulations (ACECQA 2017b) mandates the designation of an educational leader in every service to lead the development and implementation of educational programs. Quality Area 7 of the National Quality Standards (ACEQA 2017a) presents a model comprised of two complementary leadership roles. Managerial responsibility is assigned to the nominated supervisor whilst the development and implementation is assigned to the educational leader. This model establishes an implicit link between ‘doing leadership’ evidenced as managerial practices and ‘being a leader’

evidenced as educational practices. The latter reflects concepts of relational leadership that seek to distribute leadership within and across services (Rodd 2013; Thomas and Nuttall 2013).

Participatory leadership (McDowall Clark and Murray 2012) is a flexible and responsive approach that involves formal and informal leaders from all levels of the organisation. While this model continues to assign leadership to individuals and/or groups it also acknowledges the capacity of the organisation (site) to influence practices associated with leadership and leading. Barriers to effective educational leadership under this model include, but are not limited to, the aforementioned historical concerns (e.g., capacity, support and reluctance). Contemporary educational leaders, identified as the ‘gate-keepers’ of quality’ within their service (Bloom and Sheerer 1992, p. 593), have additional pressures to lead in particular ways in order to ensure their service meets or exceeds NQF requirements (ACECQA 2017a). Despite nature, significance and effect educational leaders have on the provision of programs, differences in status (e.g., remuneration) remain starkly different to educational leaders in schools.

The compulsory school sector

Much of the scholarship on leadership in the compulsory education sector has tended to focus on leadership as either a core attribute of an individual (most typically, the principal) or as occupying a role within an organisation, e.g., the principalship. A focus on the individual privileges notions of the agentic individual and seeks to explore the key characteristics and/or capabilities that such individuals must possess. This is most commonly illustrated in Fullan’s (2006) notion of the ‘turn-around principal’. Despite exhortations to the contrary, the concept overestimates the role of individual agency in changing the conditions for enhanced learning and teaching practices and underestimates the importance of context in changing practices. In contrast, a focus on leadership as role incumbents in organisations privileges systems whilst ignoring the ‘fine-grained properties of contextualized organizational practice’ (Lakomski 2005, viii). Notions of distributed leadership explore enactments of leadership activity rather than roles, and conceive of leadership as a shared property – an activity stretched across school’s social and situational contexts (Spillane, Halverson

and Diamond 2001). However, it still conceives of leadership activities as occurring between individuals in an activity, that is, as ‘relationships between *practitioners* who relate to one another in practices (i.e., leader-follower)’ (Wilkinson and Kemmis 2015, 2). In contrast, a small body of scholarship has recently emerged that examines notions of educational leadership or what has been termed *leading* (Wilkinson and Kemmis, 2015), from a practice theory lens. It is to this theoretical lens that we now turn.

The theory

The notion of leading as a practice ecologically connected to other key practices that form the Education Complex of modern schooling (Kemmis et al. 2012) is part of a broader turn towards practice that has characterised the social sciences in the past two decades (Schatzki 2001). The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis and Grootenboer 2008) is part of this practice turn and adopts a site-ontological approach to the study of educational practices such as leading. A site ontological approach is based on the premise that practices are inherently sites of the social (Schatzki 2002). Thus, in order to understand an organisational site such as a school, one must examine the practices (and the arrangements which hold them in place) in all their concreteness in the specific sites in which they unfold (Schatzki 2005). Hence, we adopt the verb *leading* rather than the noun, *leadership* in order to linguistically stress its ontological ‘happening-ness’ (Kemmis et al. 2014, 29) arising from the actual site in which it is invariably nested. Leading as such is not a generalisable function or an activity of an individual. Instead it arises, develops, dies off and is enabled and/or constrained by the practice architectures of specific sites.

The theory of practice architectures conceives of practices as constituting *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* (Kemmis and Grootenboer 2008) which are held in place by the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements found in or brought to a site. Although separated for analytical purposes, they nonetheless are always bundled together and held in place by the site arrangements or practice architectures noted above. For instance, when leading transitions from an early childhood setting to primary school, there may be a suite of sayings or thinking

prefigured (but not predetermined) by language, discourses and ideas (cultural-discursive arrangements) drawn from early childhood educators' and primary teachers' philosophies and understandings of transitions, e.g., concepts of 'school readiness'. The doings or activities associated with a practice such as leading for transitions and which flow from the concomitant sayings may include a series of activities associated with notions of school readiness such as testing and assessing children's readiness for school in a range of different domains, cognitive, emotional and physical. These *doings* are prefigured by available set-ups or material economic arrangements found in or brought to a site such as an early childhood setting, e.g., availability of educators/teachers to conduct assessments, the spatial arrangements of the site that may be more or less conducive to such assessments and the time over which such assessments may be conducted. Finally, leading for transitions may include a set of relatings associated with these sayings and doings, e.g., relations between educators/teachers and parents, educators/teachers and children, and the teachers/educators. These relatings are held in place by social-political arrangements, that is, relationships of power and solidarity such as the asymmetrical relations of power between early childhood settings and primary settings. Together, these practices and practice architectures create the conditions by which certain practices may emerge as noted above and others are less likely to emerge, e.g., leading for transitions practices associated with a more fluid notion of transitions as continuity (rather than discontinuity).

The research

The research reported in this paper provides an ontological account of some of the leading practices enacted by a group of early years professionals within a communicative space they called the Building Bridges Professional Learning Community (BBPLC). The physical location of the BBPLC, a small coastal town in the Australian state of New South Wales, accommodates three learning environments: a long day care (LDC) centre, a primary school and a high school. Systemically, interaction between the two schools is seamless however, up until the commencement of the BBPLC, interactions between the primary school and the LDC centre had been limited and

infrequent. As almost all of children (85 %) attending the LDC centre transition to the co-located primary school the BBPLC was set up as a cross-sectorial communicative space to investigate transitions practices and explore possibilities to enhance continuity of learning and development across the sectors.

The approach.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an emancipatory approach (methodology) that seeks to improve practice, gain greater self-understanding and critique the educational setting (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; 2005). Informed by critical theory (Habermas 1984; 1987), PAR acknowledges that participants come to the study with concerns and a commitment to take action based on their critical views of and shared concerns about current practice. Extending this approach, Critical Participatory Action Research (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014) highlights the capacity communicative spaces have to change practices (actions), establish shared understandings of practices and of the conditions in which they are enacted. Informed by the participants' previous experiences and demands on their time, the actions of the BBPLC (i.e., planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning) were developed by the first named author in conjunction with the research participants as iterative cycles of actions structured around the four-term school calendar. Consistent with the approach, responsibility for the research and associated actions of the BBPLC was taken collectively.

The participants.

The members of the BBPLC included four early years educators/teachers: two from the preschool room in the LDC (Penny and Peta) and two from the kindergarten²⁷ rooms in the primary school (Karen and Kris). Four executive staff: the director of the LDC (Paula), the principal (Kevin) and assistant principal (Kate) of the primary school and the assistant director (David) of the systemic authority governing the school. All were directly or indirectly involved in transitions practices/policies and have been identified using pseudonyms. The first author, who had a long-

²⁷ In New South Wales, Australia, Kindergarten is the first year of compulsory schooling

term association with the jurisdictional authority and shared the concern, was invited to participate in the BBPLC research as a “critical friend” (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014, 189).

The evidence²⁸.

Adhering to the guidelines of the approach evidence gathered during each of the four cycles of action undertaken by the BBPLC to “nurture self-reflection about our practices, our understandings of our practices, and the conditions under which we practice” (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014, 70). As detailed in Table 7.1, the evidence gathered was designed to capture conversations conducted in or about the BBPLC.

Table 7.1 Evidence gathered

	Research Journal
Cycle 1	Survey Questionnaire
22.01 – 24.04	Meeting Transcript (2 hours 25 minutes), Interview transcripts (7 hours 8 minutes)
Cycle 2	Research Journal
29.04 – 28.06	Meeting Transcripts x 2 (9 hours 46 minutes)
Cycle 3	Research Journal
15.07 – 20.09	Meeting Transcript (6 hours 51 minutes)
	Research Journal
Cycle 4	Survey Questionnaire
08.10 – 20.12	Meeting Transcript (5 hours 20 minutes), Interview transcripts (5 hours 8 minutes)

The online survey questionnaire was developed using Qualtrics™ and the link distributed by email to the participants during the first cycle of the study. Seven of the eight participants completed the survey, responses were anonymous. The semi-structured interviews (Kvale 2007) were conducted during cycles one and four. The interviews provided participants an opportunity to speak confidentially about their lived experience (Flick 2009) of the BBPLC. The interviews (14) were audio recorded and transcribed, the questions were developed using existing evidence (survey results, meeting notes and research journal). Five BBPLC meetings were audio recorded and transcribed. All transcripts were provided to participants for validation (Kvale 2007) and if required

²⁸ Also referred to as ‘data’

amendments made. The evidence generated by the BBPLC served two purposes, the first to inform the actions of the BBPLC and the second to inform the doctoral research of the first author investigating the question: How might shared understandings of practices enhance continuity during transitions to school?

The analysis.

According to the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014) the purpose of analysis is to understand the site-specific arrangements or ‘set-ups’ (Schatzki 2006, 1863), that are enabling particular practices to emerge, rather than others. Only then can possibilities for change arise (Kemmis et al. 2014). Examining data through this analytical lens led to the development of a three-phase analysis process. In phase one, the data sets (survey results, interview transcripts, meeting transcripts) were analysed to identify leading practices. These were noted in a table. Where possible, excerpts from the transcripts (evidence) were recorded alongside the practices in the table. Descriptive coding (Saldana 2010) was used to consider the arrangements holding the practices in place. These were noted in the table as ‘sayings, doings or relatings’. However, due to the volume of data, relationships between the practices were obscured and so phase two was initiated. In the second phase, descriptive codes were used to construct a visual map of leading practices and arrangements, when identified lines connecting the elements were added. In phase three analytical ‘tables of invention’ (Kemmis et al. 2014, 224) were constructed to interpret and consider how the leading practices were composed in terms of the sayings, doings and relatings and consider how (if) the arrangements identified enabled and/or constrained them. This process revealed insights into ways pre-existing and new practice arrangements influenced leading practices associated with the negotiation of shared understandings of transitions to school.

Leading practices of the BBPLC

In this section, we examine how key leading practices evidenced within the BBPLC worked to negotiate shared understandings of transitions to school practices. Using the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014) as an analytical device, significant leading practices were

identified and their capacity to transform transitions practices through the formation of new practice arrangements are discussed.

Establishing an inclusive communicative space

In the first round of interviews, Kate, the assistant principal of the primary school, expressed her concern about the need to ensure the BBPLC supported inclusive intentions, actions and language so that all members felt empowered to participate as equals. Hence, from Kate's perspective, the BBPLC was conceptualised as a professional learning community, a potential communicative space (Habermas 1984, 1987), in which the participants could gather 'to reach intersubjective agreement as a basis for mutual understandings so as to reach unforced consensus about what to do in a particular practical situation' (Kemmis and McTaggart 2003, 576). Traditionally, hierarchical language is associated with different sectors of education and care systems. For example, it is not uncommon to hear parents, teachers and the wider community use positional language when discussing transitions to school (e.g., starting 'big' school). Kate expressed her concern that this language fostered hierarchical perceptions of status across the sectors and, potentially, positioned the BBPLC participants from the LDC as 'lesser'. Articulating this concern Kate emphasised her intent to establish inclusive cultural discursive arrangements that shifted the language used within the BBPLC from 'them' to 'we'.

I'm very conscious of the fact that sometimes preschool teachers have a perception that, **not that we look down on them**, but that their perception is not the same as a primary school teacher and I'm conscious of wanting to, you know **we're peers in this and we're learning together** (Kate, assistant principal, Interview 1).

Considering ways to establish these new arrangements, Kate drew on her prior experience and knowledge of a set of discourses and ideas of working in a Professional Learning Community [PLC] (Dufour and Fullan 2013). Following the discursive rituals of prior experience working in a PLC, an arrangement she brought to the site, Kate suggested the group negotiate a set of norms (protocols) to articulate the conditions of the communicative space (Habermas 1984, 1987) created by the BBPLC. Agreeing this would be a positive way forward, the group read and discussed the

background information provided. The origin, intent and purpose of the norms was explained to the group as follows:

Professional learning communities is a concept our system is pushing and it's just that when we come together as a group we understand that we are **gathering as professionals**. One of the things we do in this professional community is to establish some 'norms' - what's acceptable, what's not so that we all have the same understanding of how we are going to operate. The norms help clarify our expectation, promoting open dialogue – they are **a powerful tool for holding us all responsible and accountable** (Kate, assistant principal, Meeting 1).

The group then engaged in an open and collaborative discussion of each of the considerations listed on the information sheet (i.e., time management, listening, confidentiality, decision making, participation, expectations). Considerations of potential sources of conflict and other concerns were raised, discussed and an outcome negotiated (e.g., what information can and cannot be shared and with whom). After a lengthy conversation, the first version of the BBPLC norms were drafted and distributed to the members for further discussion at the next meeting. At the second meeting the norms were read and an invitation to change and/or edit them extended. The final version of the BBPLC norms is provided as appendix 1. These shared sayings suggested a set of cultural discursive arrangements (that is, knowledge, discourses and ideas about how to work together in this site) brought from PLCs to the site to enable the negotiation of inclusive language and practices. For example, norm 15 stated:

We will share openly and honestly, respecting that we are professionals and we can discuss matters in respectful professional settings. That does not mean that we all need to share the same views, but that we acknowledge we can each hold differing views and still work together” (BBPLC Meeting Norms).

By establishing and articulating the conditions of the communicative space (Habermas 1984;1987) this leading practice, created the potential for new cultural-discursive arrangements and practices to form. Sayings such as those highlighted in the quotes above suggest a range of new doings such as agreeing to take turns to read the norms together at the beginning of each meeting. This ritual may have seemed tokenistic, however, the opposite was true. It instead reflected shared practices and material-economic arrangements quite familiar to the group who were all affiliated with a religious

community, e.g., educators taking it in turn to select and read a prayer or spiritual text at the start of a school meeting. Hence, it potentially, served as a reminder not only of their professional responsibilities but also their collective commitment to morally ethical practices grounded in their religious practices. These sayings and doings then suggested a set of interconnected relatings, shaped by the language of reciprocity expressed in the norms, evidenced as collegiality and respect. These relatings had the potential to supplant relationships that had been previously framed by tensions by disrupting traditional hierarchical power relations between the two worlds. Perceptions of power and status were discussed in relation to the collective commitment to establish professional relationships based on reciprocity and respect. As evidenced in Penny’s (LDC educator, Interview 2) comment below, relatings informed by shared understandings and empathies were developed over time. *Another eye-opening moment, I was looking at them and listening to these teachers and I’m thinking: ‘You know what. You’re feeling exactly the same’. I felt a sisterhood with her.* Figure 7.1 presents an overview of these sayings, doings and relatings and the practice architectures (arrangements) holding them in place.

	Practices	Intersubjective Space	Arrangements	
The Practitioner	Sayings Expressed in the language associated with norms for the meetings, e.g., “open, honest, respectful, acknowledge, differing views”	Semantic space realised in the medium of language	Cultural Discursive Ideas and language derived from set-ups established by PLC protocols	The site
	Doings Taking turns to read the norms at the beginning of each meeting	Physical-time space realised in the medium of activity and work	Material Economic Religious set-ups linked to devotion / prayer (rituals)	
	Relatings As professionals committed to building relations of collegiality, reciprocity and respect	Social space realised in the medium of power and solidarity	Social Political Disruption of hierarchical power relations between teachers/educators in primary and pre-compulsory sectors	
Adapted from Kemmis et al. 2014, 38				

Figure 7.1. Project of the practice: Establishing an inclusive communicative space

Negotiating shared aspirations

The reading of norms in itself was not sufficient to build an inclusive communicative space. Instead, there needed to be other practices that complemented and built on this particular practice in order to establish and allow new practices to take root and grow. Hence another crucial set of

landscape on each side of the gap helps’. The quote captured a collective concern verbalised by participants in the first round of interviews, namely that one of the worlds (sectors) would be required to relinquish its identity to achieve the aims of the BBPLC. It also offered two metaphors that were subsequently identified as shaping the sayings, doings and relatings of the group. First, Dunlop’s (2007) metaphor of ‘two worlds’ became a symbol of solidarity, recognition and respect by acknowledging the existence of distinctly different yet equally important professional identities. Second, the metaphor of the ‘bridge’ provided an image of transitions as journeying between the two worlds and inferred crossings that were reciprocal and sustained. Together the metaphors worked to ameliorate hierarchical understandings of cross-sectorial transitions practices and binary constructions of two worlds.

The conversation which occurred at the second meeting was acknowledged by the participants as an ‘ah hah moment’, for it established new cultural-discursive arrangements that in turn opened up a space for changes to cross-sectorial transitions practices. For instance, as Penny remarked, *I think that’s probably the big **ding dong moment** for me ... it’s good to have differences and I think it’s **good to understand** how each sector is operating and to **respect, but not necessarily to blend together to be the same*** (Penny, LDC educator, Interview 2). The sayings, doings and relatings and the practice architectures (cultural-discursive, material-economic, social-political arrangements) in relation to negotiating shared aspirations are encapsulated in Figure 7.3.

The Practitioner	Practices	Intersubjective Space	Arrangements	The site
	Sayings Expressed in the Wordle image, e.g., “understandings, hope, teachers, children”	Semantic space realised in the medium of language	Cultural Discursive Metaphor of ‘two worlds’ derived from Dunlop (2007) reading	
	Doings Negotiating shared aspirations (e.g., discussion of shared pre-reading)	Physical-time space realised in the medium of activity and work	Material Economic Physical set ups of the BBPLC enabling shared conversations about aspirations	
	Relatings Establishing collegial relations while respecting sectorial differences	Social space realised in the medium of power and solidarity	Social Political ‘Two worlds’ a symbol of solidarity rather than asymetrical power relations between the two sectors	
	Adapted from Kemmis et al. 2014, 38			

Figure 7.3. Project of the practice: Negotiating shared aspirations

Negotiating immutable differences

Functional interactions between the sectors involve unidirectional transactions (e.g., passing on information about individual children's preparedness to commence school). Generally, these interactions are short-term events that reinforce asymmetrical power dynamics as professionals are positioned hierarchically as senders and receivers (Moss 2008; 2016). Systemic interactions (e.g., school-based orientation programs) are typically bi-directional and require more sustained contact between professionals. However, both types of interactions have been identified as triggers for sectorial defensiveness arising from pressures to ensure children are school ready (Boyle and Petriwskyj 2014). Typically, in systems where the early years are split, opportunities to speak about and address concerns about invisible barriers created by unequal power relationships are rare (Henderson 2014). However, in the communicative space afforded by the BBPLC these concerns were able to be raised during the first meeting. *School has the power and it's seen as education and we are still vying for that respect ... early childhood deserves to be respected, we would like to share that knowledge and power* (Paula, LDC director, Meeting 1). The distribution of power across the sectors evidenced as differences in remuneration, conditions, status and professional recognition was identified by the members of the BBPLC as an immutable sectorial difference that they had little or no agency to change. However, they were ameliorated within the lifeworld of the BBPLC as new practices and arrangements shaped by relational trust, mutual respect and agentic collegial responsibility (Kemmis et al. 2014) were formed. Enabled by a new set of social-political arrangements where *everyone is on an equal footing* (Penny, LDC educator, Meeting 4) new and different leading practices gradually emerged.

Cognisant of the fact that arrangements and practices negotiated within communicative spaces such as the BBPLC can and do change, Kate and Paula activated their positional leadership to enshrine new transitions practices and arrangements in policy. An example of this was the co-construction of a transition statement based on the learning outcomes from *Being, becoming and belonging: The early years learning framework for Australia* [EYLF] (Department of Education,

Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR] 2009). The purpose of the site-negotiated transition statement was to gather information about learning, development, aspirations and concerns from commencing children, their parents and pre-school teachers. In the pre-compulsory school sector, the EYLF (DEEWR 2009) outcomes constitute a common language (or sayings) for teachers to assess, document and report on preschool children's learning and development.

Capitalising on existing professional practices and the common language of assessment articulated in the EYLF (DEEWR 2009), the pre-school teachers could make evidence based judgements about and link learning across the sectors. As Peta, an LDC educator commented, *I linked the information that I had already collected to the transition statements and it was a **really good way to use evidence** that I've already collected to form a profile of the child. It was really easy and quick* (Meeting 5). This new practice changed existing contested social-political arrangements by acknowledging and validating of the pre-school teacher's professional practices and the children's prior learning outcomes. Although not mandated at a system level for either setting, completing the statements became an integral component of the LDC's transition and assessment policies. The school also incorporated the statements into their enrolment and transition policies. The teachers and executive staff used the information gathered to inform enrolment interviews, class placements and considerations of ways to support children's transitions. The practices associated with transition statements established a new set of arrangements that worked to enhance continuity by enabling mutually respectful processes of sharing information across the sectors during transitions.

Even though there had been no real world (system) change to sectorial inequalities beyond the BBPLC, powerful changes to the arrangements enabling and constraining transitions and leading practices possible within this site were evidenced as new relatings. As Kris, a kindergarten teacher commented, *We've had the opportunity for a lot of professional development and sharing ... and we have challenged our understandings and expectations. Yes, there are **lots of differences but there are also commonalities** and we can build on those* (Meeting 5). In this quote Kris identifies differences and commonalities as having the capacity to change cross-sectorial professional

relationships and practices. Deficit constructions of differences, shaped by arrangements that render them systemically immutable, were transformed within the lifeworld of the BBPLC into transitions capital (Boyle and Petriwskyj 2014; Dunlop 2007). Understanding difference from this standpoint foregrounds its capacity to enable changes to practices and arrangements that support continuity between the two worlds and redresses the apparent immutability of cross-sectorial professional relationships. As Kate remarked, *We’ve come to some mighty realisations acknowledging that it’s ok to be different, there are reasons why we’re different and there’s research that supports the differences in the two settings* (Kate, assistant principal, Meeting 5). Understanding that it is ok to be different and that diverse professional perspectives play an important role in the negotiation of shared understandings of practices, was also acknowledged in the BBPLC meeting norms (see norm 15 Appendix G). The sayings, doings and relatings and the practice architectures of negotiating these seemingly immutable differences are encapsulated in Figure 7.4.

Practices		Intersubjective Space	Arrangements	The site
The Practitioner	Sayings Developing a shared language about key terms (e.g., assessment)	Semantic space realised in the medium of language	Cultural Discursive Theories and research drawn from the outcomes articulated in EYLF	
	Doings Collaboratively developing a shared assessment tool for transition to school	Physical-time space realised in the medium of activity and work	Material Economic Set-ups established through the transitions statements	
	Relatings Valuing and recognizing the expertise/knowledge each sector contributes to transitions	Social space realised in the medium of power and solidarity	Social Political Validation of different but complementary expertise of teachers, disrupting more traditional hierarchies of early childhood/primary binaries	
Adapted from Kemmis et al. 2014, 38				

Figure 7.4. Project of the practice: Negotiating immutable differences between preschool and school

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we have presented empirical evidence of how leading practices associated with transitions to school at a particular site were re-shaped by significant changes to the arrangements holding traditional transitions practices in place. By applying an ontological approach, we suggest the paper departs from dominant epistemological discourses framed by universal constructions of transitions to school as events and/or processes. Historically these kinds of interactions have been mired by immutable differences accompanying binary constructions of power and authority across

the sectors however, in this study the members of the BBPLC moved beyond these traditional binaries to create a set of conditions that worked to establish shared understandings of their site-based practices. Viewing practices through the lens of practice architectures, we suggest the paper extends these discourses by reframing transitions as site-based practices. Within the communicative space afforded by the BBPLC, the participants of this study established ‘a set of relationships in which people c[ould] think openly, respectfully and critically together as a basis for deciding whether the way we do things around here is in fact rational and reasonable’ (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014, 49). The leading practices evidenced in this study go beyond managerial responsibilities and transcend power dynamics that have marred cross-sectorial collaborations (Henderson 2014). The paper provides empirical evidence of the ‘happening-ness’ (Kemmis et al. 2014, 29) of negotiating shared understandings of transitions practices by mapping the concrete details of how such practices were enabled and constrained by the arrangements found at or brought to the site. The evidence highlights the situated-ness of such practices and provides an alternate and/or adjunct lens through which to view transitions practices. Site specific policy development in the form of mutually-framed transition statements required the negotiation of a shared language (e.g., assessment) upon which to build shared understandings. Although the use of transition statements is not mandatory at this site, these statements continue to inform and re-form policies and practices in both settings. Finally, we return to the quote from the OECD (2017, 95) noting that ‘little research has been done on the direct effects of leadership on transitions’ and suggest that this paper makes a significant contribution to that gap. By providing evidence of and insights into the role leading practices and sustained professional interactions can and do play in the negotiation of shared understandings of transitions to school, the paper contributes to emerging conversations of cross-sectorial continuity.

Chapter 8: Reframing transitions

This chapter presents a synthesis of the findings of the research presented in this thesis, which reframes transitions to school as continuity (Boyle, Petriwskyj, & Grieshaber, 2018). The article has been published in the *Australian Educational Researcher*, the internationally peer reviewed journal of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE). As such it provides access to an extensive audience across both the prior to school and school sectors.

The paper was developed to draw together (synthesise) the findings reported in this thesis and the very recent (2017, 2018) contemporaneous literature conceptualising transitions as continuities in a number of different ways. Capitalising on this emerging discourse and the findings presented in Chapters 2, 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis, this publication makes a case for conceptualising transitions to school as continuity practices. Acknowledging there is little consensus of what constitutes continuity, the paper presents a synthesis of the various forms identified in the literature into three broad categories: structural, developmental and contextual continuities. Applying an ontological perspective as an alternate and/or adjunct lens through which to view transitions, the paper offers a conceptual model for examining and reframing practices and policies. It adds to an emerging body of literature applying the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer, & Bristol, 2014) to the field of early childhood education and care (Salamon, 2017; Salamon, Sumsion, Press, & Harrison, 2014; Ronnerman, Groootenboer, & Edwards-Groves, 2017). The paper offers new directions for the field by applying new ontological perspectives to a persistent challenge. This ambitious claim is supported by the following comment:

Congratulations on this paper. I believe that it is an important addition to the literature on educational transitions and sets the field off on a new direction. The use of practice architectures is innovative and rewarding ... I think this paper breathes new life into the study of educational transitions, both to primary school and potentially at each juncture in children's and young people's movement through educational systems. (Reviewer 1: *Australian Educational Researcher*)

The research reported in this chapter has been presented at the following conferences:

Boyle, T., Petriwskyj, A, & Grieshaber, S. (2018, July). *Reframing transitions to school as continuity practices*. Invited presentation at Department of Education Queensland Regional Staff State Wide Forum, Brisbane, Australia.

Boyle, T. , Petriwskyj, A, & Grieshaber, S. (2018, December). *Reframing transitions to school as continuity practices*. Paper to be presented at Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference. Sydney, Australia.

Article E

Boyle, T., Petriwskyj, A, & Grieshaber, S. (2018). Reframing transitions to school as continuity practices: The role of practice architectures. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 45(4), 419 – 434. doi.org/10.1007/s13384-018-0272-0

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Abstract

This paper makes a case for conceptualising transitions from the before school sector to the compulsory years of schooling as continuity practices. It begins by presenting an overview and critique of constructions of transitions to school that contribute to contemporary discourses and agendas (e.g., the conflation of transitions and readiness). Then recent international trends in understanding transitions as continuity are analysed and synthesised into three broad categories: structural, developmental, and contextual continuities. These categories are subsequently used to develop a conceptual model for reframing transitions. The model is then used to: first, examine a snapshot of familiar Australian transitions practices; second, highlight the interdependence of the practices and the sites in which they are enacted; and, third, support the argument to reframe transitions as continuity practices. Finally, contributions the paper makes to transitions to school theory, research and practice are explicated.

Keywords: transitions to school; continuity; practice architectures

Introduction

The importance of a making a positive start to school has been acknowledged in international research, policy, and practice (Dunlop and Fabian 2007; Dockett, Petriwskyj and Perry 2014), yet the conditions that constitute a positive start and a definitive understanding of the term ‘transition/s to school’ remain elusive. Shifting discourses in policies about what constitutes a positive start to school add to the complexity. For example, in 2010, one Australian state regulatory authority indicated that

Transition to school should be understood as a process, not a point in time. It is an individual experience for everyone involved. While there are core elements to most children’s transitions, there are important considerations that need to be thought about

²⁹ Text is consistent with the journal guidelines: AER reference style guide and UK spelling.

and planned to ensure that each child has a successful start to school (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 2010, p. 2:1).

Later, the same authority, now known as the Department of Education and Training (DET), described starting school as “a major life transition for both children and their families. Both challenging and exciting, it is a time of change in which children, families and educators adjust to new roles, identities, expectations, interactions and relationships” (DET 2016, p. 25). The juxtaposition of these two statements reveals a shift in thinking about transitions from a process of individual consideration to a collective challenge of adjusting to new roles.

The examples from DEECD (2010) and DET (2016) emphasise complex and confusing shifts in understandings of transitions that give rise to a lack of clarity and reductive discourses. The examples illustrate what Dockett and Perry (2014a) have called the conflation of transitions and readiness. For instance, the statement from DEECD (2010) talks about ensuring that each child has a successful experience of starting school despite saying that it is a process and not a point in time. Readiness for school is often construed as key to a successful start and includes meeting set standards prior to school entry (Moss, 2013). In contrast, the DET (2016) excerpt points to a collective experience of many dimensions of change for those involved, suggesting that transitions are about processes. Considering the importance of making a positive start to school (Margetts 2014) and warnings that “almost any child is at risk of making a poor or less successful transition if their individual characteristics are incompatible with the features of the environment they encounter” (Peters 2010a p. 2), we make a case for reframing transitions to school as continuity practices.

The paper opens by presenting an overview of constructions of transitions to school as detailed in Table 8.1. The constructions, identified as key themes within transitions to school literature, present a synthesis of significant theoretical perspectives about the topic. The overview highlights the contribution each construction makes to research, policies and practices. Then, informed by recent literature framing transitions as continuities (see Table 8.2) the paper presents a conceptual model (Figure 8.1) for reframing transitions as continuity practices.

Table 8.1 Constructions of transitions

Events	A point in time, short-term, hierarchical, homogenous, starting school
Processes	Adapting to change, longer-term, collaborative, multi-layered, proximal
Continuity	Building on prior experiences, ongoing, iterative, contextual
Practices	Lived experiences, negotiated, site specific, ecologies

Transitions as events

Traditional perspectives informed by developmental theories view commencing school as a one-off change event or point in time – a universal hierarchical milestone (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead 2008). When conceptualised as an event, a positive start to school relies on an individual child's capacity to conform to the conditions of the new environment (Margetts 2014). This construction is based on the understanding that children progress through a series of natural, universal and immutable stages that become “crucial reference points for discussing optimal transitions” (Vogler et al. 2008 p. 5). Readiness assessments typically employ normative benchmarks to determine an individual child's preparedness to commence formal schooling, yet their application to cultural groups such as Australian Indigenous children is highly contested (Taylor 2011). Sometimes readiness is termed readiness to learn and is defined in behavioural terms and framed by expectations of the school system (Serry, Imms, Froude, Joffe, Heine and Merrigan 2014). The problematic ready/unready binary established by maturational constructions of readiness has been critiqued for its oversimplification of complex issues (Clark 2017). The lack of clarity in what the term means (Ackerman and Barnett 2005), the homogenising effect of age-based standards (Dockett 2014) and the potential to mistake variability in development as a deficit (Petriwskyj and Grieshaber 2011) continue to challenge early years professionals.

The association of normative readiness agendas with school and long-term success (Datar 2006; Margetts 2014), together with an emphasis on school expectations framed by statutory assessment pressures may be major contributors to heightened anxiety about school entry amongst parents (Mergler and Walker 2017), and excessive pressure on young children (Clarke 2017).

Maturational factors related to chronological age, gender, social-emotional and academic preparedness are key concerns associated with delayed school entry (Mergler and Walker 2017). Holding children back in order to provide an additional year in preschool is a common practice for concerned parents (Graue 2006). However there is a risk that doing so may also exacerbate demands for the schoolification of the preschool program (Moss 2013; OECD 2006). Not all families can afford ‘the gift of time’ (Edwards, Taylor and Fiorini 2011) and time alone does not advance learning and wellbeing (Graue and Reineke 2014). Conceptualising individual children as ready (or not) for the event of starting school is problematic, particularly for children from marginalised or non-dominant groups, because it fails to account for cultural, relational and contextual interactions and capacities (Clarke 2017; Taylor 2011; Vogler et al. 2008). Constructions of transitions as an event (e.g., starting school) and associated assessments of individual preparedness for that event are often conflated with understandings of transitions as processes and continuity (Dockett and Perry 2014b) (see Table 1 for explanations of events, processes and continuity).

Transitions as processes

Maturational constructions of academic preparedness or readiness as an event have been superseded theoretically and practically by more recent ecological, sociocultural and critical perspectives that consider transitions to school as an iterative, complex, lengthy and multi-layered process involving many stakeholders (Ackesjo 2013; Chan 2012; Peters 2014). These perspectives challenge the notion of readiness (Moss 2016) and the predictive power of norm-referenced assessments that typically identify children from minority groups as ‘at risk’ (Taylor 2011). They also advocate participatory strength-based transitions practices and policies that engage a range of actors respectfully (Lillejord et al. 2017). From this standpoint, a positive start is reliant on considering a range of contexts, perspectives and rights (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group [ETC] 2011). Community-level interventions based on early developmental assessments (Janus 2011b) are intended to redirect the responsibility for being ready from the individual child or family

to the wider community. The Australian Early Development Census [AEDC] (Commonwealth of Australia 2016) is a population-based psychological instrument that measures development across five domains - physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and general knowledge. Data, aggregated against postcodes, are used to identify developmentally vulnerable communities (DET 2017), inform subsequent interventions and to support the expansion of policies such as the Universal Access Preschool Program, which ensures vulnerable children receive the correct “dosage of high-quality early education” prior to commencing school (Fox and Geddes 2016 p. 10). However, universal approaches to measuring vulnerable children against “western-centric norms of child development” (Agbenyega 2009 p. 33) have been criticised for assigning deficit-orientated labels to difference (Ryan and Grieshaber 2005). They also devalue family insights into children’s strengths (Taylor 2011) and fail to recognise that capacity is culturally and contextually constructed (Grieshaber 2017). This perspective of transitions as processes is in tune with current policies of inclusion (Petriwskyj 2014), contextual rather than universal approaches, and international trends towards conceptualising transitions as continuity (Dockett and Perry 2014b; Peters 2010b).

Transitions as continuity

Recent international publications draw attention to the importance of *continuity* in children’s learning and well-being, and pay particular attention to transitions from early childhood education and care (ECEC) to school education (Ballam, Perry and Garpelin 2017; OECD 2017; Lillejord et al. 2017). However, there is little consensus about characteristics of continuity. In this paper, continuity is understood as “experiences and learning that build on what has gone before” (Dockett and Einarsdottir 2017 p. 133). The *Transition to School Position Statement* (ETC 2011) highlights the complex and multifaceted processes associated with transitioning to school and foregrounds a conceptual shift in thinking about transitions by describing them as a “dynamic process of continuity and change” (p. 1). Understanding continuity as a range of cumulative experiences

encompasses the different constructions of the term identified in Table 8.2 and emphasises the inextricable link between transitions and change.

Table 8.2 Transitions Continuities

Publications	Categories		
	Structural	Developmental	Contextual
OECD (2017)	Professional Curriculum and pedagogical Organisation and governance	Developmental	
Dockett and Einarsdottir (2017)	Philosophical Curriculum Administrative Organisational Physical	Developmental	
Boyle et al. (under review) ³⁰	Policy		Relational Practical

Conceptualising transitions as continuity, therefore, needs to take into account ways to address coherence in children’s experience and support for their negotiation of the inevitable change encountered as they enter school. It does not imply that preschools and schools offer mirror images or that transitions should be seamless (DEECD 2010), but that continuity revolves around certain stable and recognisable aspects (Lillejord et al. 2017), and that change is supported (Dockett, Petriwskyj and Perry 2014). Transitions to school incorporate a range of change experiences including the move from home and community to school (Dockett, Griebel and Perry 2017), from before school settings such as ECEC centres or preschools to school (Peters 2010b), and for many children, transitions to school age care (Dockett and Perry 2016). Enhancing continuity by building on what has gone before demands deep contextual consideration for children whose home and community experience differs markedly from that of the school (Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters, and Carr 2012; Hohepa and McIntosh 2017; Kaplun, Grace, Knight, Anderson, West, Mack et al. 2017); those who have not attended a prior-to-school program (Dockett 2014), and those with refugee experience, complex family circumstances or diverse abilities (Dockett, Perry

³⁰ Subsequently published: Boyle, Grieshaber, and Petriwskyj (2018)

and Kearney 2011; Mitchell, Bateman, Gerrity and Myint 2017; Petriwskyj, Thorpe and Tayler 2014).

Table 8.2 considers three publications that extend and challenge conceptions of the way continuities have been understood in relation to transitions to school. The table indicates continuity categories highlighted in these publications. Dockett and Einarsdottir (2017) caution that “while each of these types of continuities is important, attention to one aspect alone is unlikely to promote continuity of experiences or expectations for children, families and educators” (p. 142). Taking this into account, a comparative analysis of the continuities discussed in the three publications identified three complementary categories of transitions continuities: structural, developmental and contextual.

Structural continuities (Table 8.2) provide professional, curriculum, pedagogical, organisational, governance, philosophical, administrative, physical and policy frameworks to establish enabling conditions for transitions practices. The OECD (2017) *Starting Strong V* document highlights increased political and social attention to transitions and identifies a range of organisational and governance challenges affecting continuity (e.g., professionalism, curriculum and pedagogy). The influence these structural continuities have on transitions to school is discussed by Dockett and Einarsdottir (2017) who note additional elements such as physical spaces, and an historical philosophical schism between ECEC professionals in the before school and early years of school sectors. Policy, when defined as “both process and product” (Boyle, Grieshaber & Petriwskyj, under review³¹ p. x) has also been identified as a structural element affecting continuity. As shown in Table 8.2, the majority of the forms of continuity identified across the three publications attend to the ways in which transitions to school are enabled and constrained by structural factors.

Lack of attention to structural continuities and/or an attention to them in isolation of others are reported in transitions to school literature as contributing to discontinuities. Separate governance,

³¹ See: Boyle, Grieshaber, and Petriwskyj (2018), p. 172

administrative and organisational structures described as “split” systems (Moss 2013 p. 4) contribute to “complex institutional divides” (Krieg and Whitehead 2015 p. 319) that affect continuity by constraining the facilitation of shared understandings of policies and philosophies informing pedagogy, curriculum and physical environments. Historical differences in philosophies, curricula and pedagogies between ECEC and school have also contributed to learning discontinuities and professional tensions (Dunlop 2007; Moss 2013; Peters and Sandberg 2017). However, attempts to offer curricular and pedagogical alignment have met with educator resistance primarily due to a lack of attention to contextual continuities required to establish mutual respect and dialogue, and to co-construct shared understandings (Moss 2008).

Developmental continuities (Table 8.2) attend broadly to children’s ongoing wellbeing, learning and development. Continuity is dependent on the provision of high quality ECEC, a positive transition, and the collaboration of a range of stakeholders including children, parents, early childhood professionals and community services (OECD, 2017). Developmental continuities should not be mistaken for or understood as ‘readiness’. Dockett and Einarsdottir (2017) draw on a Deweyian critique of preparation and the relationship between different levels of education and care to affirm their understanding of developmental continuity as building on previous experiences and the supportive role that educators across the sectors play in this process. Considering developmental continuity in isolation from complementary continuities risks overlooking children’s unrealised potential (Dockett and Einarsdottir 2017), which can refocus attention on the reductive binary of being ready or not (Petriwskyj and Grieshaber 2011) and contribute to an overly narrow focus on school adjustment or academic learning (Boyle et al. under review³²). Nevertheless, when viewed in association with contextual considerations that attend to children’s own perspectives, developmental continuities have the potential to contribute to ongoing confidence, and a sense of agency and wellbeing.

Contextual continuities (Table 8.2) attend to site-specific proximal practices associated with

³² Subsequently published: Boyle, Grieshaber, and Petriwskyj (2018)

transitions to school. Despite not being specifically named as a category in *Starting Strong V* (OECD, 2017) or in Dockett and Einarisdottir's (2017) chapter, contextual continuities are evident throughout both documents – a testament to the complementarity and significance of this category. The two forms of contextual continuities – relational and practical (Table 8.2) – identified by Boyle et al. (under review³³) are also reflected throughout the discussion of continuity by Lillejord and colleagues (2017). Relational continuity is variously identified as partnerships, networks, collaborations and relationships among a range of stakeholders including children, families, professionals and communities. Discourses in the transitions to school literature have been predominantly focussed on children, families, schools and communities, with attention to cross-sectorial professional relationships emerging recently (Boyle and Petriwskyj 2014; Hopps 2014; Peters and Sandberg 2017). In identifying this emerging concern, the publications listed in Table 2 pay particular attention to professional relationships influenced by social, cultural and political contexts, as they set the scene for continuity during transitions to school. Practical continuity relates specifically to practices (e.g., pedagogy, programs, sharing information) associated with transitions. It includes actions such as the provision of similarities in learning environments and discussions with children on their view of inevitable changes in environments (Dockett and Perry 2014b; Queensland Department of Education 2017). Ideally, such actions are guided by children and families and take into account input from both prior to school and school educators.

These contextual continuities address a core issue identified by Boyle et al. (under review) as “the distribution of power and its impact” (p. x)³⁴, which is evidenced more broadly in transitions literature as ‘power-over’ and ‘power-to’. Addressing power differences can enhance reciprocity in communication and create enabling conditions for the negotiation of relational and practical continuity (Ebbeck, Saidon, Rajalachime and Teo 2013; Hopps 2014; Peters 2014). Discrepancies between the status of ECEC and primary school teachers, an example of ‘power-over’, present a

³³ Subsequently published: Boyle, Grieshaber, and Petriwskyj (2018)

³⁴ See Boyle, Grieshaber, and Petriwskyj (2018), p. 176

significant challenge to achieving professional continuity (OECD 2017 p. 86). Conversely, collaborative dialogic approaches to transitions were identified by Dockett and Einarisdottir (2017) and Peters and Sandberg (2017) as empowering opportunities to establish shared understandings across a range of contexts. The way power is distributed and the effect it has on transitions practices is not homogenous, as it too is influenced by social, cultural and political contexts.

Understanding and/or changing practices require careful and constant consideration of the context in which they are enacted. Paying attention to and identifying the importance of contextual continuity guards against ‘one size fits all’ approaches that privilege “instrumental and narrow discourses about readiness for school” (OECD 2006 p. 219), and contribute to discontinuities associated with transitions to school.

Transitions as practices

Up to this point, the constructions of transitions detailed above and in Table 8.1 have been informed by epistemological perspectives that focus on understanding (knowing about) transitions to school. In this section, as the initial part of reframing transitions as continuity practices, we apply an ontological theory to consider the contextualised realities (being) of transitioning to school as a lived experience. According to Schatzki (2002), “the character and transformation of social life are both intrinsically and decisively rooted in the site where it takes place” (p. xi). Schatzki also argues that the site of the social “is a mesh of practices and orders” (p. xii). To consider the realities (lived experiences) of transitions to school we attend to the practices and orders (arrangements) found at or brought to the sites in which practices are enacted. In acknowledging the ambiguity of the term ‘practice’, we adopt the following definition:

A practice is a form of socially established cooperative human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and when the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings), and when this complex of sayings, doings and relatings “hang together” in a distinctive project. (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer and Bristol 2014 p. 31)

According to the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014), people engage in practices

within intersubjective spaces that have three interdependent and inseparable dimensions: semantic space; physical-time space, and social space. The ways practices unfold within these spaces are preconfigured (but not predetermined) by the conditions (arrangements) found at or brought to the space. The meshing of practices associated with particular projects (e.g., transitions to school) shape and re-shape uniquely interdependent site-based “ecologies of practices” (p. 44).

The first dimension, semantic space, is encountered through the medium of language. It is enabled and/or constrained by the cultural-discursive arrangements found at or brought to the space. In the project of children transitioning to school, a constraining condition (arrangement) might be the absence of shared language and understandings of key developmental and structural elements (e.g., pedagogy and curriculum). The second dimension, physical-time space, is encountered through the medium of activity and work. In this space, practices are enabled and/or constrained by material-economic arrangements of the site. Applied to the project of children transitioning to school, the physical arrangement of co-located ECEC and school sites might enable continuity through sustained interactions and integrated systems. The third dimension, social space, is encountered through the medium of power and solidarity. In this space relationships are enabled and/or constrained by social-political arrangements. During transitions to school, relationships can be constrained by an unequal distribution of power among stakeholders, resulting in discontinuities. Together these three dimensions form the *practice architectures* (Kemmis et al. 2014) that shape the way practices unfold in particular sites. Transforming practices (e.g., transitioning to school) therefore requires the transformation of the “existing arrangements in the intersubjective spaces that support practices” (p. 6).

The theory of practice architectures has recently been applied to preschool contexts (Ronnerman, Grootenboer and Edwards-Groves 2017; Salamon, Sumsion, Press and Harrison 2014), suggesting its potential application in theorising and researching transitions to school. Reflection on this theory indicates that contextual continuities might include the use of a shared language by educators (for example, referring to transitions rather than readiness) to facilitate

establishment of shared professional understandings across sectors (Boyle and Grieshaber 2013) and more coherent communication with children, families and communities (Ahtola et al. 2015).

Reframing transitions as continuity practices

Reframing is a strategy used to create desirable change by redefining and/or relabelling phenomena (Petriwskyj 2014a). The desirable change advocated in this paper is to reframe transitions to school as continuity practices informed by a site ontological perspective based on the assumption that “the way a practice unfolds or happens is always shaped by the conditions that pertain to a particular site at a particular time” (Kemmis et al. 2014 p. 13). Reframing is presented as a way to shift the professional conversation in early education from transitions constructions framed by epistemological perspectives to practices (Table 8.1) framed by ontological perspectives. Applying this perspective to the transitions continuities identified in Table 8.2, a conceptual model for reframing transitions as continuity practices (Figure 8.1) was developed.

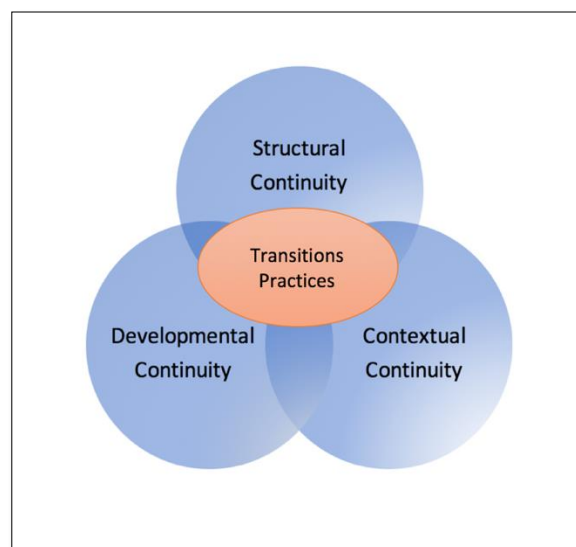


Figure 8.1 Conceptual model: Transitions as continuity practices

The model presents a framework for thinking about transitions as continuity practices to understand better the way they unfold in particular sites and how/if the arrangements that prefigure them enable and/or constrain continuity. The model also draws attention to the ecological interdependence of continuity practices and highlights the fact that they rarely, if ever, unfold as

universal actions across sites. To illustrate the potential for applying a site ontological perspective, two familiar Australian snapshots have been selected specifically to highlight the interdependence of practices and conditions (arrangements), and support the argument to reframe transitions as continuity practices. The snapshots align with two persistent challenges identified in *Starting Strong V* (OECD, 2017): curricula alignment and professional collaboration; and highlight the contribution an ontological understanding of transitions might make to theory, practice and policy. The snapshots are purposively familiar to illustrate the conceptual point of reframing.

Snapshot 1. Curricular alignment: “continuity in curricula and transition practices between early childhood education and care (ECEC) and primary school has a positive impact on children’s later academic and social success” (OECD 2017 p. 147). Following the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Curriculum Corporation 2008), policies aimed at achieving the aspiration “to provide every child with the opportunity for the best start in life” (p. 11) have led to significant changes supporting the education of children from birth to eight years of age. Organisational and governance (structural) continuities have been enhanced through integrating the administration of education and care in departments of education across all Australian states and territories. For the first time, Australia has national frameworks informing the education of children from birth until the time they leave school. The *Australian Curriculum* (Australian Assessment, Curriculum and Reporting Authority 2014) and *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* [EYLF] (Commonwealth of Australia [COA] 2009) recommend the alignment of learning across the prior to school and school sectors, yet neither has the authority to mandate the structural changes required to do so at a state level. Philosophical differences between these documents, evidenced as discontinuities in conceptualisations of curricula, pedagogies and outcomes, add to the complexity of negotiating transitions (Grieshaber and Shearer 2014; Krieg and Whitehead 2015). These differences have material effects on the arrangements enabling and constraining individual and collective practices across and within transitions sites.

In response to this anomaly the state of Victoria developed *The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* [VEYLDF] (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009), a document for educators to use with all children from birth to the age of eight years, and which provides “a common language to describe young children’s learning and common principles to guide practice” (p. 8). However, two recent reviews of transitions practices have suggested this attempt to enhance continuity through structural and developmental convergence has not been without its challenges (Semann et al. 2015), due to persistent and largely unattended philosophical differences and an absence of “shared understandings of the roles of the two sectors” (Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO) 2015 p. 22). This snapshot identifies the impact of failing to attend to contextual continuities such as discrepancies between the status and perspectives of professionals across the sectors that are required to achieve curricular alignment (Boyle and Petriwskyj 2014). Applying an ontological site-based perspective to this challenge requires considering the ways specific site-based practice ecologies enable and constrain curricular alignment.

Snapshot 2. Professional collaborations: “strong collaboration across ECEC settings or between ECEC centres and primary school can also help children and families better navigate the transition to school” (OECD 2017 p. 212). The importance of collaborating with a range of actors (including children) in transitions practices (Lillejord et al. 2017) is acknowledged in Quality Area 6 of the Australian National Quality Framework (ACECQA 2017c), which focuses on collaborative partnerships with families and communities. As Standard 6.3.2 from the National Quality Standard states, “continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities” (ACECQA 2017c p. 157).

In some Australian states (Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland), *Transition Statements* have been developed to share relevant information about children’s prior to school learning experiences with teachers in the first year of compulsory schooling. The transition statements are mapped against the five outcomes of the EYLF (COA 2009), educators, parents and

children also contribute relevant information. At a systems policy (structural) level, transitions statements are promoted as an effective mode for transferring information and a useful resource for enhancing continuity of learning (DET 2016). However, a recent review of educational transitions (VAGO 2015) noted that whilst the statements represented a valuable resource to enable structural and developmental continuities, lack of attention to contextual continuities (professional relationships and shared understandings) limited the capacity of the statements to support transitions and continuity. Enhanced attention to relationship-building practices such as regular reciprocal classroom visits or discussion meetings may overcome the shortcomings of written-only professional communication, although ethical questions such as parental consent need to be resolved (Hopps-Wallis and Perry 2017). Establishing and maintaining professional collaborations across the sectors is a fundamental factor influencing transitions practices, yet as Dunlop (2017) argues “there is nothing automatic about successful communication and relational agency between different professional groups” (p. 267). Interdisciplinary cross sectorial networks afford the time and space for key stakeholders to engage in conversations about and negotiate actions in response to site specific complexities affecting continuity during transitions to school (Dockett and Perry 2014b; Peters and Sandberg 2017).

Both snapshots reflect epistemological policy perspectives that construct curricular alignment and professional collaborations as products and processes intended to have universal application. Hypothetically, the processes of curricular alignment and professional collaboration should be achievable, as the structural supports (policies) exist to facilitate greater developmental continuity (building on prior learning and experiences). Pragmatically, the practice of achieving either is challenging due to the lack of attention to contextual continuities including asymmetrical relationships and the absence of shared understandings of transitions. Applying an ontological perspective requires investigation of the site-specific arrangements that enable, constrain and connect practices to reach inter-subjective agreement about and understandings of transitions,

negotiate shared language about and principles of continuity, and establish mutually respectful relationships.

Conclusion

To conclude, we make the case for reframing transitions to school as continuity practices that supersede discourses of readiness (events) and have the capacity to address prevailing challenges affecting transitions to school identified in the documents listed in Table 8.2. Using the conceptual model in Figure 1 to reframe transitions as continuity practices foregrounds, or at least affords equal weighting to ontological considerations of the context (site) in which transitions practices take place. The model highlights the role of practice architectures when considering transitions to school. It enhances the visibility of contextual continuities and reiterates the imperative to consider the convergence of all three forms of continuities in order to reframe practices that apply homogenous universal approaches to transitions that do not account for site-based differences.

Reframing transitions as continuity practices contributes not only to theory, but also to transitions to school practice by providing a conceptual model to address persistent challenges. These include but are not limited to considering national concerns about problematic transitions for specific groups such as Indigenous children in more situated, nuanced and non-stigmatising ways (Dockett 2014; Perry 2014); moving beyond contested concepts of readiness to consider broader support provisions for all children (Taylor 2011); and addressing discontinuities in pedagogic approaches based in deep philosophical differences while respecting the aims of each sector (Dunlop 2007). Changing practices requires transformation of the arrangements that enable and constrain them. Negotiating site-relevant responses “requires the assent and commitment of the practitioners” (Kemmis et al. p. 8) rather than an over-reliance on top-down systemic policies and universal approaches (Boyle and Grieshaber 2017).

Finally, reframing transitions as continuity practices offers opportunities for a revised research agenda that highlights the key role of early years’ professionals as architects of transitions practices. Such research might consider how and if the practice ecologies of transitions projects are

enabled and/or constrained by the arrangements (conditions) of the site. Once identified these conditions can be critiqued, shaped and re-shaped to create new arrangements to support equitable cross-sectorial professional relationships and negotiate shared understandings underpinning transitions framed as continuity practices.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

The aim of this critical participatory action research study was to investigate the question ‘How might shared understandings of practices enhance continuity during transitions to school?’ Findings of the research have been discussed in Chapters 5, 7 and 8. The evidence indicates that shared understandings of practices can enhance continuity across the sectors by effecting changes to the conditions (arrangements) shaping how transitions to school are understood and enacted in particular sites. As detailed in Chapter 5, early findings of the study have been cited in recent international publications indicating its relevance to the field of transitions. The following section explicates some of the contributions the study and thesis make to the field of transitions to school, and considers policy pointers from the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2017 report – the most recent and comprehensive synthesis of practices and policies available to date. Finally, implications of the study for transitions policy, practices and future research are identified and discussed.

Contributions

Theoretical contribution. The study and thesis make an original contribution to theory by applying a site ontological perspective to research investigating and theorising transitions to school. Schatzki’s (2002, 2003, 2012) concept of site ontology understands practices as social phenomena located within sites. Practices and the sites in which they take place are mutually constitutive, therefore a practice is inseparable from the site (Schatzki, 2005). Practices are a reflection of the practitioner’s understandings and his or her own responsiveness to the conditions of the site (Schatzki, 2012). Understanding transitions as site-based practices provides a new lens through which to consider ways that shared understandings of, and a shared language about practices can be achieved. The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer & Bristol, 2014) extends this ontological contribution, and provides a critical framework for interpreting and reporting the negotiation of shared understandings of transitions practices reported in this thesis. This theoretical perspective adds to an

emerging corpus of literature applying critical perspectives to understand better what constitutes a ‘positive start’ to school and to consider how this might be achieved for all children.

The thesis and associated publications contribute to international research investigating practices through the lens of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis, et al., 2014). Since its inception (2008), the theory has been used by scholars in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Columbia, Australia and New Zealand to research an array of educational practices. To date, over 200 scholarly works including books, monographs, reports, special issues in journals, book chapters, journal articles and doctoral theses employing the theory have been disseminated. This thesis extends this theoretical corpus by adding to the small number of scholarly works investigating early childhood education practices (Salamon, 2017; Salamon, Sumsion, Press & Harrison, 2014; Ronnerman, Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2017). Furthermore, it adds a new topic (transitions to school) to this collection of scholarly works.

Methodological contribution. The theory-method package (Nicolini, 2012) detailed in Chapter 3 provides a framework for considering how theories and methods work together. In this study, the theories and approach (methodology) employed have, over time, become inextricably entwined, making attempts to address them separately within the thesis an awkward task. The ‘package’ presented here has, to the best of my knowledge, not been presented in any other published works. As such it makes a unique contribution to researchers considering an explanation of how theories and approaches (methodologies) work together. Similarly, there is little methodological guidance available for those seeking to undertake an integrative literature review. Chapter 2 addresses this gap by synthesising the guidance provided by Toracco (2005) to present a six-step methodology for conducting integrative literature reviews. The paper explicates the steps involved and provides an exemplar for conducting similar reviews, offering enhanced depth of analysis of an extensive body of literature.

This thesis provides empirical evidence of the capacity that critical participatory action research [CPAR] (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014) has to activate critical self-reflection on

practices and the conditions shaping them. In this study, the participants of the BBPLC engaged in cross-sectorial collective action “to transform the conduct and consequences of their practices” (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 5). Capturing and recording these actions as they unfolded within the intersubjective space afforded by the BBPLC contributes to understandings of the approach (methodology) and provides an example for others seeking to employ the approach. It also provides evidence of the capacity of the approach to accommodate theoretical and conceptual shifts as they unfold over the lifetime of the thesis. In 2013, the theory-method package (Nicolini, 2012) informing the doctoral research associated with the study contained two elements; PAR (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, 2005) and communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987). However, by engaging in the iterative and recursive process of zooming in and out (Nicolini, 2012) of the practices of the BBPLC, it became apparent that these elements did not provide an adequate explanation of the practices or the conditions enabling and constraining them (Kemmis et al., 2014). As detailed in Chapter 3, these limitations led to the expansion of the package to include CPAR (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014), the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) and Schatzki’s (2002, 2003, 2012) perspective of site ontology. The thesis provides a good example of the way projects such as a PhD thesis can change over time and grow with the candidate, especially when the approach facilitates this.

Conceptual contribution. The thesis contributes to an emergent conceptualisation of transitions as continuities. Recent international literature (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017; Educational Transitions and Change Research Group, 2011; Lillejord, Borte, Halvorsrud, Ruud, & Fryer, 2017; OECD, 2017) conceptualises transitions as a range of continuities (see Table 8.2). These concepts were analysed, synthesised and reframed (Petriwskyj, 2014a) to develop an original conceptual model for thinking about transitions as continuity practices (see Chapter 8). The model draws attention to the particularity of practices and their ecological interdependence, and in doing so highlights the fact that practices rarely, if ever, unfold as universal actions. In a field dominated by

epistemological constructions of the topic, the model offers an alternate site ontological perspective to reframe traditional normative understandings that conflate transitions and readiness.

In identifying and critiquing existing understandings of cross-sectorial relationships, Moss (2013) offered a new conception: “the vision of a meeting place [which] opens up other possibilities for cross-sectorial dialogue ... for constructing new shared understandings, values, ethics and practices” (p. 44). In 2013, there were very few Australian empirical studies reporting evidence of cross-sectorial professional relationships or cross-sectorial perspectives of transitions practices. Those that did (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Henderson, 2012; Hopps, 2004) noted unequal power dynamics and the absence of shared expectations as contributing factors to discontinuities during transitions to school. This thesis addresses some of the challenges associated with this “properly political question” (Moss, 2013, p. 2) and thus contributes to critical conceptions of cross-sectorial professional relationships that reflect notions of equity and reciprocity. By engaging in critical participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014), the members of the BBPLC established a meeting place to negotiate a “better understanding of differences” (Moss, 2008, p. 229) and break down the “invisible barrier” (Henderson, 2012, p. 21) constraining cross-sectorial collaborations.

In Australia, the state of Queensland Department of Education has recently shown interest in the conceptual model presented in Chapter 8. Recently, I was invited to present the model to approximately 100 ‘transitions coaches’ engaged in implementing the *Enhancing K-2 Alignment and Continuity Program* (Queensland Department of Education, 2018) across the state. Since then, I have been in conversation with the Department regarding ways in which the model might be used to complement existing policies, programs and resources such as the *Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool* (Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2017). This resource is used in every Queensland government school to inform the development of site-specific cross-sectorial transitions programs. It seems reasonable to suggest the conceptual

model may contribute to the ways practitioners think about the alignment of structural, developmental and contextual elements of these transitions programs.

Site-specific contributions. The BBPLC was established to investigate shared concerns about transitions practices at a particular co-located site. The critical participatory actions undertaken by the participants of this study resulted in a number of site-specific contributions. First, enhanced understandings and alignment of cross-sectorial curricula and learning frameworks were achieved through a series of joint professional learning actions. The development of a co-designed transitions statement (see Chapter 6) was dependent on the negotiation of shared understandings of cross-sectorial learning and assessment practices. The statement supplanted the school's 'readiness checklist' and offers a consistent benchmark for, and common language about, assessing and communicating learning outcomes³⁵ across the sectors. Parents and children also use the statement to communicate their aspirations, interests and any concerns they may have about commencing school. The statements are then used to inform the school's interview and enrolment procedures. Transformative practices activated by the development and implementation of the statements changed the 'sayings' and 'doings' and 'relatings' possible within the two worlds on this one site.

Second, sustained cross-sectorial collaboration and communication contributed to the transformation of professional relationships from a "philosophical battleground" (Danny, Director, Interview 1) to a "sisterhood" (Penny, LDC Educator Meeting 5). Recognition that the negotiation of shared understandings did not require either sector to relinquish their philosophical or professional standpoints was a catalyst for transformation of the social-political arrangements at the site. Agreeing to disagree about immutable practices (e.g., pedagogical approaches) was informed by shared understandings of the conditions that shape these differences. This in turn displaced threats of "schoolification" (OECD, 2017, p. 20) in the pre-compulsory sector and reduced tensions associated with inequitable power relations across the sectors.

³⁵ Assessed against the outcomes specified in *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

Third, collaborations between the co-located LDC centre and school continue to be scheduled every term. Scheduled activities include regular visits between the settings and shared use of resources (e.g., the school library and LDC centre outdoor play area). These activities work to supplant the “invisible barrier” (Henderson, 2012, p. 21) that once existed, and to create new conditions for practices (sayings, doings and relatings) at the site. Regular interactions between the settings helped to establish “common ground” (OECD, 2017, p. 256), resulting in better understandings of differences that might influence transitions experiences for children and families. Structural differences between the settings were identified and transitional activities planned. For example, realising the differences in lunch routines (children at the LDC centre have their meal served to them by the staff), the LDC centre BBPLC participants scheduled times for the children to experience eating a packed lunch in the school playground. Similarly, once the children had started school, the kindergarten teachers provided additional lunchtime supervision in the same area following the same routines. Identifying these differences and having the opportunity to plan site-specific transitional experiences well before the first day of school meant children, parents and teachers could discuss and allay concerns associated with changed practices.

Finally, at the time of writing this chapter only two of the eight 2013 BBPLC participants still work at the site of the study. However, the BBPLC continues to meet regularly to engage in conversations about and plan cross-sectorial activities. The sustainability of the collaboration rests primarily on the fact that the new conditions and traditions (Kemmis et al., 2014) established by the BBPLC in 2013 were enshrined in transitions policies that continue to inform practices at the site.

Implications

The evidence reported in this thesis regarding the negotiation of shared understandings of transitions practices suggests four key implications for policy, practices and future research. The following implications and suggested future actions have been aligned with the policy pointers from *Starting Strong V: Transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*

(OECD, 2017, pp. 253-270), with the aim of enhancing transitions from early childhood education and care to primary school.

Change how ‘school readiness’ is interpreted (OECD, 2017, p. 254). Although “the ‘readiness’ rhetoric is changing” (OECD, 2017, p. 20), considerations of children *becoming* school students continue to far outweigh considerations of children *being* in a transitional phase or of *belonging* to a particular context (site). Building on recent interpretations of transitions as continuities (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017; Educational Transitions and Change Research Group, 2011; Lillejord, et al., 2017; OECD, 2017), this thesis presents a case for reframing transitions as continuity practices. If continuity is understood as “experiences and learning that build on what has gone before” (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017, p. 133), then universal normative understandings of school readiness have no role to play in transitions practices. This thesis argues that continuity practices supersede traditional ‘one-size-fits-all’ interpretations of transitions and have the capacity to address prevailing challenges associated with ensuring all children establish and maintain a positive trajectory. The conceptual model presented in Chapter 8 provides an alternate lens to inform changes to the way transitions are interpreted and understood. Future actions supporting this change might include:

- i) Conducting a multi-site (multi-national) comparative study of transitions to school practices using the conceptual model and the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) to identify and analyse continuity practices, and the conditions enabling and constraining them within the various sites.
- ii) Applying the approach and theoretical model to investigate other educational transitions (e.g., between primary and secondary school).
- iii) Examining how/if the conceptual model assists practitioners and policy makers to develop programs within their sites/jurisdictions (e.g., Queensland Department of Education).
- iv) Examining ways to support and inform families regarding current conceptualisations of transitions, and its application in early childhood.

View transitions as multi-directional (OECD, 2017, p. 256). Transitions to school are neither one-off events or a single journey from A to B. Children and their families make multiple excursions to and from a variety of contexts across and within the pre-compulsory and compulsory school sectors. Multi-directional approaches to transitions rely on establishing “common ground, which will result in better understanding of each other’s methodologies and purposes, and ultimately create better coherence between ECEC and school” (OECD, 2017, p. 256). This thesis provides empirical evidence of the capacity a critical participatory approach (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014) has to establish this common ground. If the intention of transitions policies (e.g., transitions statements) is to enhance continuity and alignment (coherence) then further consideration of ways to establish common ground is critical. As evidenced in this study, transitions collaborations are significantly challenged by the absence of shared understandings of practices and a shared language to engage in substantive dialogue about them. The site ontological approach to establishing common ground reported in this thesis may offer insights into ways shared understandings might be established between a wider range of transitions stakeholders. Future actions supporting this policy pointer might include:

- i) Reinforcing and extending the common ground established by using shared understandings/language to develop artefacts (e.g., videos, websites, brochures, guides, software apps, practitioner journal articles) to promote knowledge exchange and professional debate among a range of transitions stakeholders within and beyond the education and care sectors.
- ii) Developing teacher education course learning materials and professional development modules that prompt critical thinking about the multi-directional nature of transitions and establishing common ground for understanding transitions as continuity practices.

Develop a national plan, strategy and guidance to encourage coherence in transitions (OECD, 2017, p. 261). In Australia, *Becoming, being and belonging: The early years learning framework for Australia* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) provides guidance and support for educators

working in the pre-compulsory sector. Similarly, the *Australian curriculum* (Australian Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014) sets out the curriculum to be taught in the compulsory school sector. Both documents recommend alignment, yet there is no mandate at a national level to do so and little evidence of support to achieve this (Barblett, Barratt-Pugh, Killgallon, & Maloney, 2011). The absence of a plan, strategy or guidance to support coherence accentuates the imperative for action at a national level. In this study, transitions practices were strengthened and continuity enhanced when the participants engaged in professional development to establish shared understandings of their respective learning and curriculum frameworks. The provision of funding to release the participants to engage in the study and associated professional development activities “during their regular working time and with specialist support where needed” (OECD, 2017, p. 259) was integral to the achievement of these shared understandings. The capacity early childhood education professionals have to learn together and from each other, and to lead learning, remains a relatively under-utilised resource within Australia. The actions undertaken by the BBPLC to engage in cross-sectorial professional learning may provide insights into ways this can be achieved at other sites. Consideration of policy support at a national level to guide these strategies appears to be warranted as currently there is no national plan or strategy providing guidance about transitions. Future actions supporting the development of a nationally coherent approach to transitions might include:

- i) Investigating strategies to support/lobby for the establishment of cohesive national early childhood education policies with a particular emphasis on nuanced approaches that permit locally-relevant application.
- ii) Investing in cross-sectorial professional collaborations to enhance opportunities for establishing common ground for shared understandings of continuity practices.
- iii) Examining changes in the professional learning of both early childhood and primary school teachers to embed explicit attention to transitions to school, professional collaboration and

critical reflection. Deeper reflection and collaborative practice may demand revised approaches to the professional learning of teachers.

Place an emphasis on good leadership (OECD, 2017, p. 259). Chapter 7 of this thesis presents an alternate view of leadership as leading practices (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015). This perspective has the potential to inform as yet unexplored possibilities for enhancing continuity during transitions. Shifting the lens from positional leadership (noun) assigned to individuals, the ontological perspective of *leading* (verb) highlights the “happening-ness” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 29) of practices within sites. In examining ways leading practices worked to facilitate the negotiation of shared understandings, the thesis provides insights into ways leading might inform continuity practices in other sites. In this study, *good leading* was exemplified in practices that went beyond taking a self-affirming “celebratory stance” (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015, p. 604). Leading practices that facilitated engagement in challenging conversations about power, status and immutable differences led to transformative changes to practices and the conditions enabling and constraining them. Given “little research has been done on the direct effects of leadership on transitions” (OECD, 2017, p. 95), this study has implications for considering approaches to and understandings of good leadership. Future actions supporting investigations into the effects of leadership on transitions might include:

- i) Further research (e.g., multi-site, multi-state, multi-national case studies) employing the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) to investigate how leading practices work to shape transitions practices and how these are in turn shaped by the conditions of the site.
- ii) Examine ways to link leading practices across the sectors to enhance collaborative professional engagement and encourage the negotiation of shared understandings of transitions to school policies and practices.

In conclusion, this study set out to investigate how or if establishing shared understandings of transitions practices might enhance continuity during transitions to school. The participants,

motivated by “educational praxis”³⁶ (Kemmis, et al., 2014, p. 26), engaged in difficult conversations and pushed boundaries to ensure the children in their care received the best education they could provide. What ensued over the twelve months of cross-sectorial collaborations reported in this thesis is a testament to the capacity educators have to transform practices and reset the collective memory of the way things are done in the site by forming new “practice traditions” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 27).

³⁶ Understood as “action that is morally-committed and informed by traditions in a field” and “history making action” (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 26)

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Appendices

Appendix A. Bibliography of literature reviewed excluding items cited in reference list

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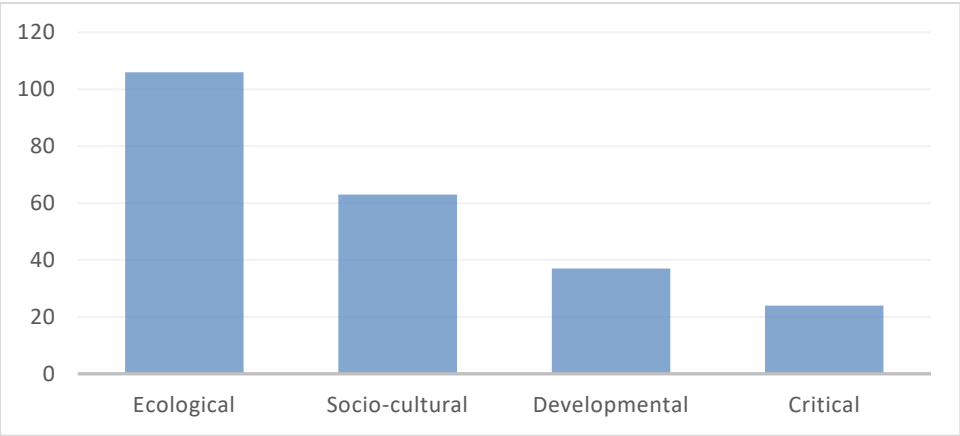
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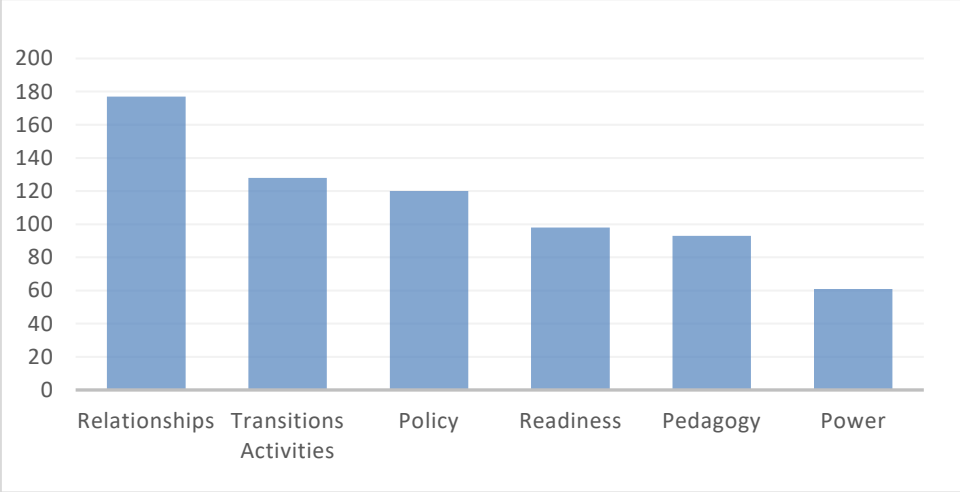
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Appendix B. Visual Summaries

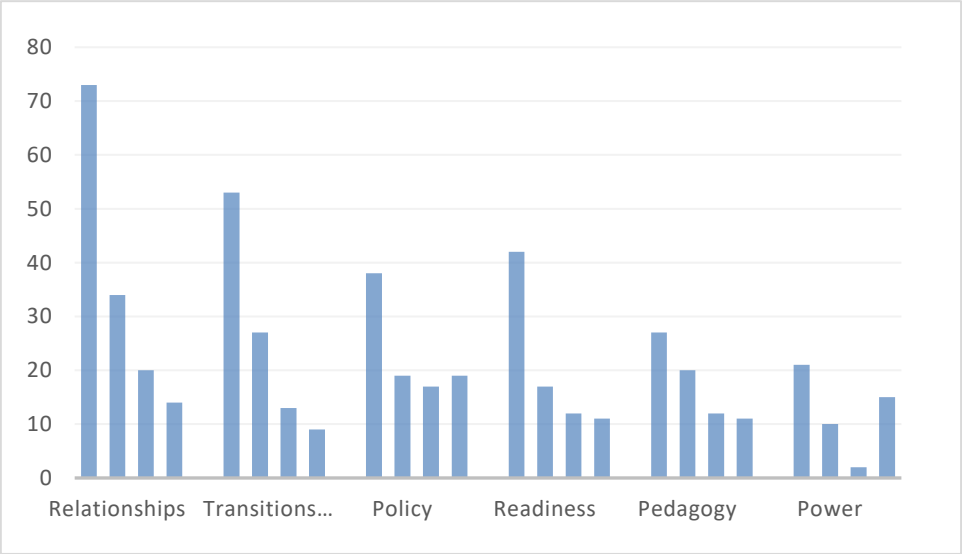
VS1: Representation of theoretical perspectives (2000 – 2015)



VS2: Representation of recurrent concepts (2000–2015)

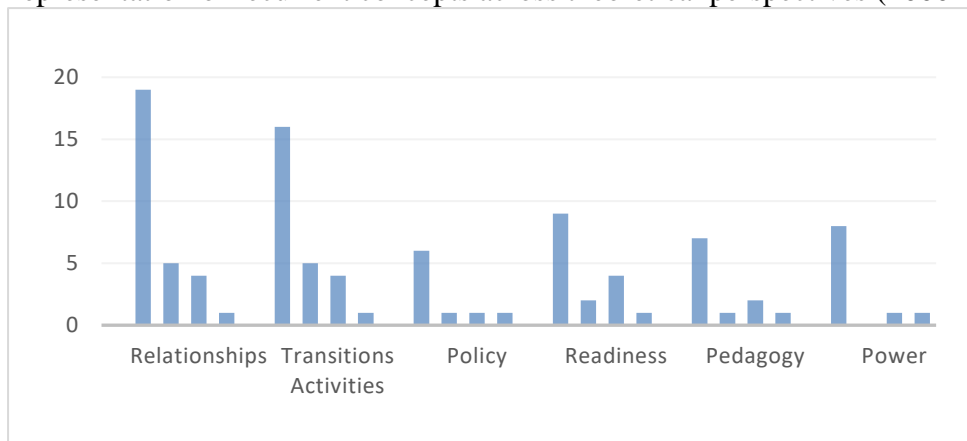


VS3: Representation of recurrent concepts across theoretical perspectives (2000–2015)



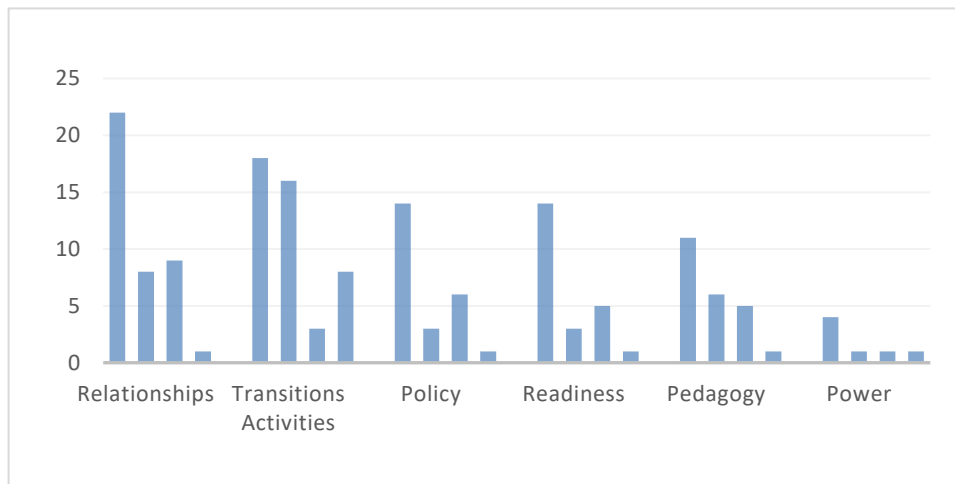
Read perspectives from left to right as: Ecological, Socio-cultural, Developmental, Critical

VS4: Representation of recurrent concepts across theoretical perspectives (2000–2005)



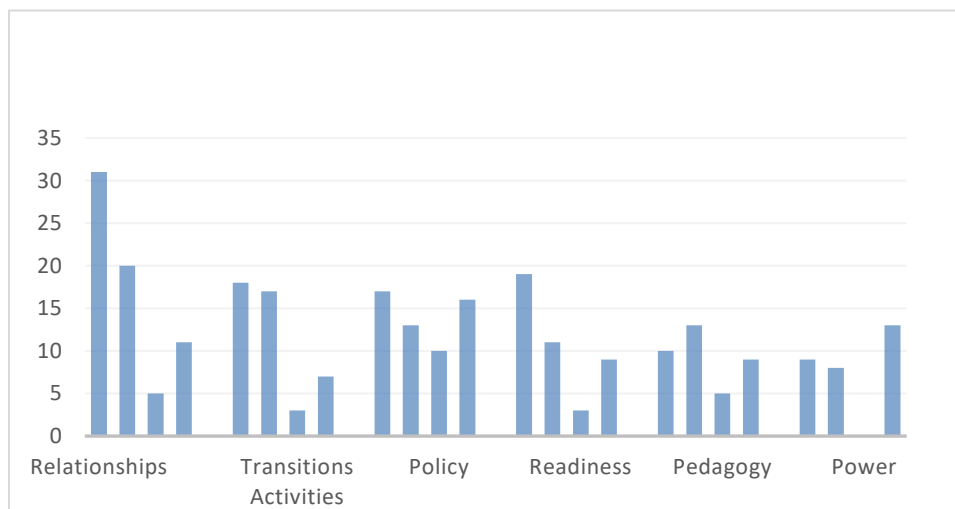
Read perspectives from left to right as: Ecological, Socio-cultural, Developmental, Critical

VS5: Representation of recurrent concepts across theoretical perspectives (2006–2010)



Read perspectives from left to right as: Ecological, Socio-cultural, Developmental, Critical

VS6: Representation of recurrent concepts across theoretical perspectives (2011–2015)



Read perspectives from left to right as: Ecological, Socio-cultural, Developmental, Critical

Appendix C. Concept Tables

Table 2.2

Multi-theoretical Perspectives of Relationships

Themes	Theoretical Perspectives			
	Developmental	Ecological	Socio-cultural	Critical
Nature	Adjustment	Contextual	Interactional	Professional
Characteristics	Engagement	Collaboration	Interpersonal	Unequal
Conditions	Co-operation	Communication	Reciprocity	Facilitation

Table 2.3

Multi-theoretical Perspectives of Readiness

Themes	Theoretical Perspectives			
	Developmental	Ecological	Socio-cultural	Critical
Assessment	Individual	Collective	Converged	Contested
Programs	Normative	Community	Interdisciplinary	Political
Communication	Uni-directional	Infrequent	Multi-directional	Hegemonic

Table 2.4

Multi-theoretical Perspectives of Pedagogy

Themes	Theoretical Perspectives			
	Developmental	Ecological	Socio-cultural	Critical
(Dis)Continuity	Cognitive	Coherent	Collaboration	Alignment
Approaches	Different	Change	Relational	Tension
Understandings	n/a	Mutual	n/a	Complex

Table 2.5

Multi-theoretical Perspectives of Power

Themes	Theoretical Perspectives			
	Developmental	Ecological	Socio-cultural	Critical
Context	Institutional	Systemic	Social	Community
Distribution	Supervisory	Imbalanced	Disruptive	Covert
Approach	Acquisition	Intervention	Collaboration	Dialogic

Appendix D. Cycle 1 Survey Questionnaire

Cycle 1: Building Bridges

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Welcome to the 2013 Building Bridges Project Survey - Questionnaire. The purpose of this tool is to provide you with an opportunity to express your opinions and ideas anonymously. Responses to each question will be collated individually so if you are concerned that your qualifications 'give you away' be assured the information you provide in this question will not be linked to subsequent questions. I would encourage you to respond to each question without reservation, there are no 'wrong' answers to these questions. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

Q2 Please list your qualification/s and year/s of completion. For example:
Diploma of Teaching (Infants) 1981
Bachelor of Education (Primary) 1990

Q3 What do you hope to achieve by participating in the 2013 Building Bridges Project (outcomes)?

Q4 What might assist the achievement of these outcomes (bridges)?

Q5 What might hinder the achievement of these outcomes (barriers)?

Q6 Is there anything you would like to say about past experiences (positive or negative) of participating in a Project like this?

Q7 How would you define / describe attributes of 'school readiness'?

Q8 Please consider and rate the following statements

	Extremely Important (1)	Very Important (2)	Neither Important nor Unimportant (3)	Very Unimportant (4)	Not at all Important (5)
Teachers should establish cross-sectoral relationships. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transition should involve long-term cross-sectoral activities. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attributes of school readiness should be defined and communicated to parents. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Policy documents should be linked across the sectors. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transitional pedagogy should reflect the philosophy and practice of both sectors. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers should have more time to engage in cross-sectoral activities. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Continuity between the sectors during transition is ... (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q9 Are there any other comments / thoughts / ideas / suggestions you would like to make about the Project?

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix E. Cycle 4 Survey Questionnaire

Cycle 4: Building Bridges

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Thank you for participating in this survey, it should only take 10 minutes of your time. The purpose of the survey is to provide you with an opportunity to express your opinions and ideas anonymously. I would encourage you to respond to each question without reservation as there are no 'wrong' answers. Once again, I thank you for your time and consideration, your contribution to the project is greatly appreciated.

Q2 What do you think the 2013 Building Bridges Project has achieved (outcomes)?

Q3 What has assisted or enabled the achievement of these outcomes (bridges)?

Q4 What has hindered the achievement of these outcomes (barriers)?

Q5 How would you respond to the question: Is my child ready for school?

Q6 Is there anything you would like to say about your experiences (positive or negative) during the 2013 Building Bridges project?


Q7 Are there any other comments / thoughts / ideas / suggestions you would like to make about this or future projects about transition to school?

Q8 Please consider and rate the following statements

	Extremely Important (1)	Very Important (2)	Neither Important nor Unimportant (3)	Very Unimportant (4)	Not at all Important (5)
Teachers should establish cross-sectoral relationships. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transition should involve long-term cross-sectoral activities. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attributes of school readiness should be defined and communicated to parents. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Policy documents should be linked across the sectors. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transitional pedagogy should reflect the philosophy and practice of both sectors. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers should have more time to engage in cross-sectoral activities. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Continuity between the sectors during transition is... (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix F. Informed Consent

 Queensland University of Technology Brisbane Australia	PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT
Transition to school: Continuity of pedagogy	
QUT Ethics Approval Number 1300000058	

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Researcher: Tess Boyle, PhD Candidate, Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
0420 553 595 tess.boyle@scu.edu.au

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Sue Walker, QUT
07 31383195 sue.walker@qut.edu.au

DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as a professional collaboration between XXXX Primary School, XXXX Long Day Care Centre the XXXX School Office and Tess Boyle, PhD candidate QUT.

The purpose of this project is to consider ways teachers across sectors might achieve continuity of pedagogy during transition. The Project has two components. The first is a continuation of the Building Bridges Transition Project commenced in 2012 the aims and objectives of this component will be determined by you and fellow participants, these will be evaluated and documented in a Project Report. The second component, a Doctoral Study titled Transition to school: Continuity of pedagogy will be guided by the following questions³⁷ and reported on in the form of a Doctoral Thesis.

- What role do concepts of readiness, transitory activities, pedagogy, relationships, power, time and policy play in understandings of transition held by teachers?
- How might a shared understanding of transition inform continuity of pedagogy across the sectors?

You are invited to participate in this project because you were a participant in the 2012 Building Bridges Project and indicated your support for continuing investigations into transition into 2013. And/or you are directly involved policy and practice influencing the transition of children from XXXX Day Care Centre to XXX Primary School.

PARTICIPATION

Participation will involve:

- Completing an anonymous online survey questionnaire with short answer responses that will take approximately 15 minutes of your time. Questions will include considerations of the aims (e.g., your desired outcomes) of the project, meeting protocols / processes undertaken and achievement of these aims. The survey questionnaire will be administered in Terms 1 and 4.
- Sharing your understanding of key concepts and issues about transition in a semi-structured interview. In the interview, you will be asked to provide responses to approximately ten questions, this should take no more than 30-45 minutes of your time. The interviews will take place in Terms 1 and 4 at a time and location of your choosing.
- Attending a meeting each term to plan and reflect on the cycles of action. These meetings will also provide an opportunity to continue the facilitation of professional development and cross-sectorial collaborations. Participants will be released from teaching or other duties to attend these meetings. It is also understood that some participants may opt not to attend all or any of these meetings.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and a copy of the transcript will be available on request. Meeting notes will be summarised and displayed on a whiteboard once the group has agreed these are an accurate recording of outcomes/ considerations they will be recorded by photograph.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you agree to participate you do not have to complete any question(s) you are uncomfortable answering. Your decision to participate or not participate

³⁷ Note: The research questions and title of the thesis were modified during the doctoral study

will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with any of the participants and organisations previously mentioned. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the project without comment or penalty. Any identifiable information already obtained from you will be destroyed. However, as the questionnaire is anonymous once it has been submitted it will not be possible to withdraw the questionnaire information.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

It is expected that this project will directly benefit you, your learning community and the profession. Through your participation it is anticipated that you will gain a shared understanding of the key concepts informing transition and policy and practice. Further that the cross-sectorial activities undertaken will inform the pedagogical approaches taken during transition to enhance continuity as children move from one environment to the other.

The importance of continuity during transition has been identified as having positive short and long-term outcomes for the children, their parents and the wider community. By providing an example from the field of how cross-sectorial long-term transition activities can be implemented the study may inform the practice of teachers and teacher educators. The findings of the study have the potential to inform policy within the two sites and the Lismore Diocese Catholic Schools Office.

Publications from the study will disseminate information to the wider profession adding to an emerging body of transition literature informed by critical cross-sectorial approaches.

RISKS

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this project. These include inconvenience in the form of your absence from your learning environment to attend meetings and the possible disruption this may cause. In an effort to minimise this inconvenience the dates for meetings will be negotiated and advertised well in advance and where possible funding for release will be provided. There may be an inconvenience in the form of the time required to complete the survey-questionnaire and interview as they are likely to take place out of work hours and will not be funded for relief. To minimise this inconvenience the survey – questionnaire can be accessed online at your convenience and you will determine time and venue of the interviews. You should also be aware that discussions undertaken as an open forum during the meetings will include supervisory staff.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially; the online survey-questionnaire responses are anonymous. The audio / video recordings will be made available to you to verify your comments and responses; all recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the Project. These recordings will not be used for any other purposes; they will be kept under lock and key prior to being destroyed. Data included in any publications, including the Project Report, Doctoral Thesis and any subsequent publications will be de-identified. Data will be stored securely as per QUT's Management of Research Data Policy. Please note that non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used as comparative data in future projects. The XXXX Schools Office is providing funds for the project; therefore, they will require an evaluation of the project against the aims and outcomes in the form of a Project Report, and this will be informed by data –driven evidence.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

The return of this form signed and completed will be accepted as written consent to participate in this project. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the project without comment or penalty. Any identifiable information already obtained from you will be destroyed. However, as the questionnaire is anonymous once it has been submitted it will not be possible to withdraw the questionnaire information.

CONCERNS / COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Transition to school: Continuity of pedagogy

QUT Ethics Approval Number 1300000058

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Tess Boyle, PhD Candidate, Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
Researcher: 0420 553 595 tess.boyle@scu.edu.au
Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Sue Walker, QUT
 07 31383195 sue.walker@qut.edu.au

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the researcher.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Understand that non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used as comparative data in future projects.
- Understand that the project may include audio and/or video recording.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Name

.....

Signature

.....

Date

.....

Please return this sheet to the investigator.

Appendix G. Meeting Norms

Building Bridges Professional Learning Community. Meeting Norms

TIME

1. We will meet as a Professional Learning Community **once** each school term, that is, four times a year.
2. A full day meeting will start at 9am and finish at 3pm.
3. A half day meeting will start at 12.15 and finish at 3pm.
4. At each meeting, we will decide on the next meeting date and whether the meeting will be a full or half day.
5. LDC teachers will visit the kinder classrooms throughout the year. These visits will be organised so that all teachers have sufficient notice.
6. Kinder teachers will visit the preschool room throughout the year. These visits will be organised so that all teachers have sufficient notice.

LISTENING

7. We will be respectful of all people wishing to speak.
8. We will ensure that one person speaks at a time and that we will listen to each other.
9. We will try to encourage all to have the opportunity to share their opinions and ideas.

CONFIDENTIALITY

10. Some of the information we discuss will be kept in confidence, as appropriate, determined using our professional judgement. Any information about the children in the LDC preschool room or the kinder classes will be treated confidentially. Sharing of assessment folders or developmental folders will be confidential.
11. We will respect the right of all participants in “Building Bridges PLC”, to be open and honest during meetings and we will not share information which causes embarrassment to any participant.
12. We understand that general information about “Building Bridges PLC” can and should be shared with other teachers, parents and the wider community.

DECISION MAKING

13. We will seek to agree on decisions together and make decisions that we can all live with, even if consensus is not reached.
14. Should conflict arise, we shall seek resolution of this, firstly through our own management team.

PARTICIPATION

15. We will share openly and honestly, respecting that we are professionals and we can discuss matters in respectful professional setting. This does not mean that we all need to share the same views, but that we acknowledge we can each hold differing views and still work together.
16. If a kinder or preschool teacher is away on the day a meeting is planned then we have agreed that the meeting will still proceed.
17. If Tess, Paula or Kate are away on the day a meeting is planned we have agreed that we will reschedule this meeting.

EXPECTATIONS

18. There are expectations with regard to the research side of this project. Tess has outlined these and given you a letter with regard to these.
19. We expect that scheduled class visits go ahead once dates have been decided, unless changes to the routine prevent these. In this case, teachers are asked to notify the other teachers concerned, as early as possible and to reschedule the visits as soon as possible.

Written by: *Names redacted*