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"How can I support positive transitions in my early years setting?

Ingrid Burrell

A Research Dissertation submitted to the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Research in Practice)

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Supervised by: Dr Leah O'Toole

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<u>Declaration</u>

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Student name: *Ingrid Burrell*

Date: 09/09/2022

Abstract

This self-study action research study explores, *"How can I support positive transitions for children in my early years setting".* Children's experiences when they are growing up are full of change such as moving from home to an early year setting, moving house, the loss of a family member, or a break-up of the family unit. All these changes in a child's life are regarded as transitions. The aim of this research was to examine my current practice and to identify how I support positive transitions in my early years setting, while also aligning these practices to my values. This research project occurred within my place of work at an early childhood education and care facility.

The research methodology I used included questionnaires, a reflective journal, anecdotal and event sample observations, and team meetings. These qualitative research tools would enable me to gain the perspective of participants while including my own learnings as a researcher. All ethical considerations were adhered to during this research, these included gaining informed consent from the participants, and the collection and storage of data.

There were two action research cycles within the self-study, all of which focused on enhancing how transitions occur and happen within my setting. From the extensive but rich data that I collected, I then analysed this data to search for certain themes that were evident. From this I was able to extract my findings which showed indications of episodes of where I was living more closely to my values, and this enabled me to make a claim to knowledge.

Furthermore, this study recommends and extends the understanding of transitions. By

adopting a right-based approach I was able to identify and respond to the multiple

ways children communicate and express their views. By leveraging the children's

agency, through an emergent curriculum instead of imposing adult-controlled routines

and by collaborating with parents to help me understand children's perspectives and

structuring the daily routine accordingly. These findings have led me to deeply

consider my practices, identity, and values as an early childhood educational leader.

Furthermore, it has supported me in constructing a living theory of my practice by

providing a rationale and awareness as to why I had previously engaged in such

practices.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Leah O'Toole for her kindness, support, and guidance over the past three years since I met her. Your passion for learning and education is compelling and your dedication to Early Childhood Education and Care continues to inspire me. Thank you.

To the lecturers of the Frobel Department, in particular Bernadette, Patricia, David and Seamie, thank you for your knowledge, support and expertise. I would also like to extend my thanks to all the members of NEARI. Their continuous support and guidance have also inspired me over the course of this year.

To the Board of Directors, Management, Educators and Children of my setting, thank you for being so generous with your time and for your many contributions during the past year. This thesis would have not been possible without you. I would also like to thank my two critical friends for their support and for keeping me on track throughout the year.

Finally, to my loving family, words cannot express my gratitude for the support you have given me over the past few years. To my parents Victor and Pamela, who have supported me throughout my whole life and in particularly over the past three years, your unwavering support and encouragement does not go unnoticed. To uncle Bob, I miss you with all my heart and I hope I make you proud. Finally, to my partner Kevin and our amazing children, Alannah, Fionn and Donnacha, you have brought me so much joy and love over the past three years. Our little heroes, you inspire me to be the best I can be. I love you. X

<u>**Table of Contents**</u>

List of Figures

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to the Board of Management.

Appendix 2: Letter to Management

Appendix 3: Letter to Early Years Educators

Appendix 4: Letter to Parents

Appendix 5: Information sheet for all Participants

Appendix 6: Consent Form- Board of Management/Management

Appendix 7: Consent Form-Parents

Appendix 8: Consent Form-Children

Appendix 9: Children/Parents Assent Forms

 Appendix 10: Action Plan

Appendix 11: Baseline Questionnaire

Appendix 12: Learner Record Observation sheet

Appendix 13: Event Sample Observation

Appendix 14: Timetable for Team Meetings

Appendix 15: Parents/Guardian Questionnaires

Appendix 16: Agenda Team Meeting-Cycle one

Appendix 17: Transcript Team Meeting One- Cycle One

Appendix 18: Transcript Team Meeting Two- Cycle Two

Appendix 19: Transcript Team Meeting Three-Cycle Three

Appendix 20: Transcript Team Meeting Four-Cycle Four/ Start of Cycle 2

Appendix 21: Transcript Team Meeting Two-Cycle Two

Appendix 22: Transcript Team Meeting Three-Cycle Three

Appendix 23: Exit Interview with Key Worker

Appendix 24: AISTEARSIOLTA Toolkit

<u>List of Abbreviations</u>

AR   Action Research

ARP   Action Research Project

AISTEAR   The Early Years Curriculum Framework

CoP   Community of Practice

ECEC   Early Childhood Education and Care

ECCE   Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme

EYE   Early Years Educator

KY   Key Worker

Chapter One

Introduction

This chapter represents the self-study action research (SSAR) and reflective journey which I embarked upon. The purpose of this journey was to enhance how I can support smooth transitions for children in my early years setting. This chapter will focus on describing the aims and rationale of this research journey by exploring and reflecting upon the context and background of the research. I will also discuss my values and then provide a synopsis on each chapter within this thesis.

Rationale

The main goal of this research was to investigate how I can support smooth transitions for children. Upon embarking on this course, we were asked to reflect on our teaching practices and to choose an area which we would like to focus on and enhance . A concern surfaced as the reflection process developed and I felt the need to investigate it further.
I noticed that the children in my pre-school class found it hard to transition between the indoor and outdoor environment within my pre-school setting. Similarly, some children also found it difficult to transition between activities and they were becoming increasingly frustrated with daily practices within the room (CECDE, 2006: Dockett and Perry, 2002).

The term "transitions" have a variety of meanings that are not readily captured in a single definition, one generic definition would be that transitions are key events and/or processes occurring at specific periods or turning points during the life course (Vogler et al, 2008). While Dunlop and Fabian (2002) define transitions as "the passage from one place, stage, state, style or subject to another over time". The early years of a child are critical as they lay

the foundation for children's cognitive, personal, social, emotional, and physical development.

The concepts of transitions itself is rapidly changing as it is being explored in greater depth. Ramey & Ramey (1999) advise that the issue of transition is emerging as an important new construct in early childhood education and Care (ECEC), replacing the construct of school readiness. The concepts of transitions are now recognised as central to young children's experiences and well-being and has become a widely discussed and researched topic over the past number of years (O'Kane, 2008).

Due to the increased interest around this topic, there are many meanings and interpretations surrounding the areas of transitions. This study will discuss horizontal, vertical and mini-transitions and how these all impact on children transitioning and adjusting to the setting. Since the global COVID 19 pandemic hit over two years ago, how children transition into and around our early years settings has significantly changed. For example, children enter the setting via allocated drop off zones, parents are not permitted into the setting, there is no mixing of play pods, settling in periods all happen outdoors and extra cleaning and sanitization measures have been put into place.

Educators have had to create a completely new teaching-learning environment for the children and are required to reimagine the sociocultural relationships to pedagogical practices. There was a dramatic shift in the indoor-outdoor learning environments. With that I had to reimagine how children transition between the environments and how my relationships with the children would be impacted on by these changes. These transitions needed to be made as smooth and as meaningful as possible.

<u>Values Statement</u>

As my values are the foundations on which this research has come about, I feel that it is of upmost importance that I outline and define my values at the outset of this research study. Throughout this research journey, my values have become clearer and more defined. Initially, to characterise my values, I examined the core motives and actions that guide my everyday practice and then located these actions with the conceptual frameworks (Glenn, 2006).

The main motivation that I focused on was my everyday interactions with the children. My core values are care, relationships, children's voices and children's rights and inclusion all of which are underpinned by the concept of love. Relationships are at the heart of my practice; I am dedicated to nurturing interactions and to building strong relationships with children, their parents and with my fellow colleagues.

I believe that children learn best when they feel safe, secure and can trust their early years educator. Young children need to feel secure attachment (Cassidy et al.,2013; Bowlby: 1969). Relationships provide comfort, reassurance and security and interactions that are respectful and consistent increase the child's confidence and competence to explore, develop, and learn (NCCA, 2009; CECDE, 2009). For the children to feel safe and secure in my pre-school class I need to respect their human rights. I need to build on their abilities, interests, experiences, cultures, and background and provide for their needs and facilitate them to initiate activities, to make choices and to become independent and responsible (NCCA, 2009:27: UNCRC, 1989).

The writings of Neil Nodding's guided me in my journey to clarify my values especially the value of care. Nodding's (1995) discussed the role of care in education and stated that "when we care, we want to do our very best for the objects of our care" (Nodding's, 1995: 676). Nodding's also talks about the attitude of the teacher towards children being crucial in developing caring relationships with students. Nodding's states that teachers can have a great

influence on children and "it should be legitimate to spend time developing relations of trust by talking with children about problems that are central to their lives and guiding them towards greater sensitivity and competence across all the domains of care" (Noddings, 1995:679).

Purpose of this research

The purpose of this research was to enhance how I can support smooth transitions for children in my early years setting. I wanted the children to recognise that I value their thoughts, opinions and ideas about their learning and development. In conjunction with this, I wanted to enhance and to gain more knowledge in relation to the methodologies which are considered effective in enhancing my values of care, relationships, children's voice, and children's rights. I wanted to ensure the children would feel comfortable, valued, respected, heard, and listened to therefore enabling me to live more closely in the direction of my values.

Self-Study Action Research

"Action Research is a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:297). Action research is often referred to as a "self-study enquiry" carried out by participants who wish to improve their practices, "their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:162) Similarly, Sullivan et al., (2016) states that self-study action research (SSAR) is unique to the researcher and by investigating their own practice they will enhance their practices further. Action research is a process of "seeking knowledge about practice" to learn more about our professional lives" (Sullivan et al, 2016:26).

The action researcher will stand to gain a better insight into their way of teaching and reflect on their values as a person, therefore leading to a more informed understanding of their professional practices.

Furthermore, it will allow the researcher to evaluate whether their values are being lived out in practice or is the "I" in the question, "How do I improve my practices?" existing as what Jack Whitehead coined as a "living-contradiction" (Whitehead, 2018: 12). The focus throughout this research project will be on what "the self" can learn from the experience and about their own practice (McNiff, 2002., Sullivan et al, 2016: 25).

The Context of this research

This self-study action research was conducted in a privately run early childhood education and care facility. This facility is based in the east of Ireland and is in a rural setting. We educate and care for children aged from one year to twelve years of age and have a daily occupancy of 100 children. The setting offers full-day care, part-time care, ECCE pre-school, and an after-school club. Within the early childhood education and care department, there are 22 members on the team. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I was only permitted to work with educators from a particular play pod, known as (Zone D). This meant that I had to alter the number of participants for this research project, so I sought the permission from six EYE who were all working within the same pre-school play pod (zone D). I spoke to them about my research, and I sought their permission to become participants of this study.

All six educators agreed to participate. The members included the setting supervisor, the inclusion officer, and four early years educators (EYE) from within the same play pod. I also sought the permission of the seven children and their 13 parents. All children and parents gave permission. The research was carried out on children who attended the first year of the

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) pre-school. My position within the setting is that of an early year's educator/ researcher and student.

Background of the research Journey

My journey within my current setting has been that of a professional one and one that I never expected when I started back in 2014. I began in October 2014, as a Montessori teacher working alongside a fellow colleague and seventeen children. By 2016, I had progressed to Creche Supervisor and in June 2017, I was appointed Creche Manager. I stayed in this position till July 2020, until I was due to take up Maternity Leave. I am currently on a career break to raise my small children while also completing this Masters, therefore my role now is as an educator/ researcher and a student in the setting.

Overview of the chapters

This thesis consists of five chapters:

Chapter One:

An introduction to the research which also outlines my values statement and the decision and justification to use a Self-study action research approach to this study. It also highlights the rationale which underpins this research.

Chapter Two:

The literature Review will focus on my examination and critical analysis of a variety of literature with regards to defining transitions, research on transitions, theorising transitions,

relationships during transitions, voice of the child, parent's role, key workers role, the role of the environment and current policy.

Chapter Three:

Methodology will discuss the research methodology and methods I implemented during this research process. The rationale for choosing self-study action research is discussed while I reflect on both my ontological and epistemological values. This chapter also includes the reflective models and action research models which I implemented in this research. I will discuss the data collection methods that I used to enhance my practice and to answer my research question. I will also discuss ethical considerations and limitations of this research project.

Chapter Four:

Findings and Discussions, presents the data gathering methods implemented during the self study action research process. It also discusses the data analysis process, while critically reflecting on the data findings.

Chapter Five:

Conclusion and Recommendations, the final chapter of this thesis provides a summary of the main findings of the research. It also describes the impact this research has had on my values and practice as an early years' educator. It concludes with a discussion on the limitations of this research and how I will disseminate this research locally and within the wider early educational sector.

31

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to discuss the rationale for commencing upon this chosen research topic through discussing the background, context and aim of this research. I also discussed my own values which played a pivotal role in not only selecting this research topic, but the methods utilised to answer my research question. To conclude this chapter, I provided an overview of each chapter to support ones' navigation through the document.

Literature Review

Chapter Two

Introduction

This chapter will review literature pertaining to *"How can I support smooth transitions for children in my pre-school setting".* The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relevant literature based on "transitions" and how children transition into and within my pre-school setting. Through an in-depth literature review I will define what is meant by the term "transitions" and the different types of transitions that are relevant for this research topic. Secondly, I will make linkages throughout to national and international perspectives on transitions, attachment theory, socio-cultural theory, and bio-ecological theory. Finally, I will discuss the role of the educator, the key person approach, the role of parents, the role of the environment and the importance of the child's voice in transitions.

What are Transitions?

Transitions are universally defined as a passage, movement, or development, from one state or place of being to another (Meleis, 2010). One generic definition would be that transitions are key events and/or processes occurring at specific periods or turning points during the life course (Vogler et al, 2008). Transitions are characterised by phases of concentrated learning and accelerated development in a social context (Welzer, 1993).

Gorgorio et al. define transitions as, [*n]ot as a moment of change, but as the experience of changing, of living the discontinuities between the different contexts… the construct 'transition' is, in our understanding a plural one. Transitions arise from the individuals need to live, cope, and participate in different contexts, to face different challenges, to take profit*

from the advantages of the new situation arising from the changes. Transitions include the

process of adapting to new social and cultural experiences (2002:24)

In practice, transition concepts are often used in much differentiated and specific ways, for example, in terms of vertical and horizontal 'passages' (Kagan and Neuman,1998:366). Vertical transitions are described as the major changes that take place as a child moves into and through the early years system of services. Internal transitions occur when a child moves within a setting, because of their age or stage of development (O'Connor, 2018; Dunlop, A., Fabian, H. 2007)**.**

Horizontal transitions are less distinctive than vertical transitions occurring on an everyday basis. They refer to the movements children routinely make between various spheres or domains of the lives (e.g. everyday movements between home and school) (Vogler at al. 2008). These structure children's movements across space and over time and into and out of the institutions that impact on their well-being.

Horizontal transitions are much broader and include those that a child experiences on a day-to-day basis for example from home to pre-school or throughout the day within the setting (O'Connor 2018). Mini-transitions are the changes that happen within the setting on a daily basis, for example, changing activities. Brooker describes the child as not just "stepping up" the ladder to the next stage of schooling, but "stepping sideways" (Brooker, 2008; 25) through the different elements of possible provision that they and their family might have to experience.

Research on Transitions

Since the late 1990's, research directions on transitions have been shifting with more studies understanding transitions as a multi-layered and multi-year process involving multiple continuities and discontinuities of experience (Petriwskyj et al, 2005: 63). Transitions have gained prominence as a critical area of study in early childhood (Brooker, 2008; Fabian & Dunlop ,2007; Dockett, 2018). For a significant number of children attending centre based ECCE settings, transitions between age groups are likely to be an inevitable experience. However, the literature on these transitions is remarkably sparse, with only a handful of studies such as the contributing to an understanding of these times of change (Vogler et al. 2008; NCCA 2016). Initial work on transitions in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) tended to focus almost solely on vertical transitions, for example, pre-school to primary school but Brooker suggests that transitions are not only about the milestones on the way to starting school (O'Connor, 2016:52; Brooker 2008:25). Brooker points out that government policymakers tend to view children's transitions purely in terms of "school readiness" (Brooker, 2008) given that school readiness is now a major focus of government, in the academic discourse.

There is an expectation that children are ready for entry to school in the prime areas of personal, social, emotional development, communication, language and physical development (Brooker, 2008; Hutchinson and Palaiologou, 2016). State investment in the early childhood sector has increased by an unprecedented 141% over the past five budgets (DCYA, 2021). In 2019, the Government announced a whole-of-Government Strategy called "the First Five Strategy" and it builds on the many positive development for young children in recent years. It is a ten-year plan to help make sure all children have positive early experiences and a great start in life. The strategy sets out to significantly enhance early childhood and make a huge contribution to the lives of young children, society and the economy over the short, medium

and long term (DCYA, 2022). It states that 96% of all children participate in the universal preschool programme. The principles of this strategy are that early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported. Relationships and interactions with significant others, and the environment in which they take place, play a central role in the quality of the children's experiences in early childhood. First five acknowledges the importance of supportive and smooth transitions in early childhood (DCYA,2022)

Early years transition research and policy is especially important to realising the rights of young children, as this phase of life is generally acknowledged as a period of accelerated and intense change, involving multiple developmental, social, and institutional transitions, each of which has implications for practice and outcomes (Vogler et al, 2008). Therefore, we need to plan for them appropriately (Bomber, 2007).

Theoretical perspectives on transitions

Several theorists have examined the concepts of transitions and their impact on children's lives. For this paper, I am going to look at Bronfenbrenner's and Brookers theories. Bronfenbrenner describes a "transition" as an alteration to the persons ecological environment that brings change in a person's self or social identity, changes in physical space or both (Bronfenbrenner 1989: 26).

Bronfenbrenner's research on educational transitions in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has gained increasing recognition and has highlighted the importance of educational transitions for children and their families (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner (1979) approaches transitions, from an ecological perspective and defines transitions as an alteration to a person's ecological environment that brings identified "systems", layers that we move into and out of throughout our lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

For example, that the microsystem of (home-pre-school) of a child's life is rich in transitions and these influence a child's well-being and the need for links in between the systems. Consequently, for Bronfenbrenner when a child is moving from home to an ECEC it represents not only a change in the layers of his/her environment, but equally a change in the children's identity from "child" to "pupil". In that sense educators should understand that to effectively accommodate children they need to ensure that they provide an environment where there is an emphasis on the inner changes that happen to children as well as the external changes. The ecological approach recognises the child's immediate experiences in context, but also can capture the child's patterns of interactions between individuals, groups and institutions as they unfold over time (Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta, 2000: 500).

Bronfenbrenner's major work, "the ecology of human development" (1979) describes, "the human individual as a participant in an array of interlocking systems", all of which have an impact either directly or indirectly on his or her development (Brooker,

2008: 20). Brooker provides a relatively simple explanation of this complex idea

"each setting the child experiences", e.g. home, ECEC are described as a

"microsystem", and each of these has a role to play in the child's development (Brooker, 2008). Bronfenbrenner argues that the most important contribution to a child's well-being is the set of links between the micro-systems. The more links there are and the stronger these links are, the better the child's experience and outcomes are likely to be (Brooker, 2008: 21). Therefore, to make the linkages in practice consideration needs to be given to parental involvement, information from setting to home and vice versa. The presence of familiar persons or familiar objects and the importance of routines, and the key worker approaches (O'Connor, 2018: 52).

Brooker (2002) extended on the work of Bronfenbrenner and examined the role of culture on transitions. She researched children's, parents and teacher's experiences in relation to culture,

religion, social class, linguistics and other micro-systemic factors she found that children had

to adjust to school life, routine, rituals, rules, codes of communication and interaction, but at

the same time recognised that the imbalance between home and the setting could emerge

(Hutchinson and Palaiologou, 2016; Brooker, 2002).

Attachment Theory

Another prominent theory that may provide insights into transitions is the attachment theory.

Attachment theory was first outlined in 1958 and more than half a century later, it continues

to be a subject of much research and debate (O'Connor, 2018; Duschinsky et al, 2018;

Vicedo, M. 2020). An attachment is described as "a bond that develops from a child's

instinctive need for safety, security and protection". The most prominent name in attachment

theory must be John Bowlby. His attachment theory focuses on the development of those first

feelings of emotional security, on how and what they need to happen and what happens if

they do not develop as well as they should (O'Connor, 2016: Hutchinson., Palaiologou,

2016).

Attachment theory contributes to our understanding of early relationships and attachments

and the necessity of feeling secure before venturing forth to explore the world (Mac Dougall

and Brown, 2016). Bowlby (1969) suggests that babies show stranger anxiety, a fear of

unfamiliar persons and contexts and that this often causes young children stress, this is also

known as "separation anxiety". This is the fear of being separated from caregivers (Vondra

and Barnett, 1999).

Bowlby's attachment theory has become the rationale for a standard procedure for the

transition of children under three and their parents into childcare institutions (Dunlop and

Fabian, 2007). Attachment theory provides early years educators with a convincing account

of how children's relationships, interactions and attachments should be supported by the

concepts of understanding of attachment theory, and this is an important step towards understanding two very important aspects of transitions, a secure base and emotional resilience (O'Connor, 2018; Hutchinson and Palaiologou, 2016; Neaum, 2016). Bowlby's work has helped educators to see that having the certainty of a "secure base" for our children to take risks and to move away from their primary caregivers, educators and makes them secure to move onto the next step of their lives (0'Connor, 2018; Neaum, 2016). Contrary to what we might expect, we do not build emotional resilience by surviving lots of negative experiences, it is done by positive experiences of being warmly loved and cared for, responded to and valued unconditionally that build' an image of ourselves as lovable and capable human being's and teaches us to be able to self-regulate in times of crisis (O'Connor, 2018: Neaum, 2016: Hutchinson and Palaiologou, 2016). This is relevant when we are thinking about the transition's babies and young children very often experience. A securely attached child is building up an image of themselves as someone who is loveable, this is because of the responses that they are getting from the adult and others around them. They have built their memory of their parents, they feel safe, they know when something makes them feel insecure and scared and because of this they learn that their attachment figure is reliable. This will help them cope when things go wrong, they trust others to help them, they are building that all important "emotional resilience" (O'Connor, 2018). Therefore, these special relationships are affectionate and sensitive to the child's needs, they provide the child with enough attuned and predictable responses to reassure them that they will have their needs meet if required (Hutchinson., Palaiologou, 2016).

Bio-ecological Theory

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Bronfenbrenner argues that the most important contribution to a child's well-being is the set of links between the micro-systems. The more links there are, and the stronger these links are, the better the child's experience and outcomes are likely to be (Brooker, 2008).

Therefore, to make the linkages in practice considerations needs to be given to parental involvement, information from setting to home and vice versa. The presence of familiar persons or familiar objects and the importance of routines, and the key worker approaches (O'Connor, 2018).

Brooker (2002) extended on the work of Bronfenbrenner and examined the role of culture on transitions. She researched children's, parent's and teacher's experiences in relation to culture, religion, social class, linguistics, and other micro-systemic factors. She found that children had to adjust to school life, routine, rituals, rules, codes of communication and interaction, but at the same time recognised that the imbalance between home and the setting could emerge (Hutchinson and Palaiologou, 2016; Brooker, 2002).

Sociocultural Theory

Socio-cultural learning refers to the diverse ways in which educators and communities enable children to achieve mastery of culturally acknowledged and valued behaviour while the process of socio-cultural learning exists everywhere (Vogler et al, 2008). Vygotskian theory breaks from traditional developmental psychology by focusing on the importance of social interaction, it emphasises activity, rather than the individuals as a basic unit of analysis. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that children try to construct knowledge through interacting with their social environment and are influenced by the culture, beliefs and values of this environment.

In that sense, transitions can be viewed as a process where children try to make sense of the world and the communities to which they belong (Hutchinson and Palaiologou, 2016). Vygotsky viewed children as active agents in their own environment, engaging with the world around them (Vygotsky, 1978). Transitions can be understood as key moments within the process of socio-cultural learning whereby children change their behaviour according to

the new insights that they have gained through social interactions and their environments

(Vogler et al., 2008)

Implications of theory and research

Effective transitions are essential to prepare to receive children rather than to provide children to "fit" into the early childhood environment. From the literature it is important that the early years setting develops transition practices and action plans to prepare the children for such transitions (Hutchinson., Palaiologou, 2016).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) theory highlights that as children move from one setting to the other, that this represents not only a change in the layers of his/her environment, but a change in their identity from child to pupil. Therefore, it is important that we provide an environment where there is an emphasis on the inner changes that happen to children as well as the external changes (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Brooker 2002). It suggests that culture in transitions is important and that children have to adjust to school life, rules, routines and codes of communication. Therefore, we need to create environments in early years settings that take into consideration the impact of transitions on children's learning and development. To ensure that the environment offers smooth transitions and facilitates effective functioning of various cultures, religions and languages in which children live, learn, and develop supported by parents and educators. Key staff will create effective environments to facilitate the transitions of children and not changing the child to "fit" in the environment. Attachment theory has demonstrated that the transition from home to school and the separation from mother/carer is an emotional journey for children, thus early childhood education and care needs to create an environment where the "loss" of the attachment to mother/father/carer is acknowledged and children are given time to adjust to the change, (Bowlby, 1969; Hutchinson., Palaiologou, 2016, O'Connor, 2016). Therefore, it is important that children develop an attachment to a key worker within the early years setting as this provides the

children with structure, consistency and opportunities and they will start to be establishing a relationship with them.

Voice of the Child

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education project (EPPE) revealed that children do experience several transitions during the first few years of their lives (Syvia et al., 2003). During times of transition, it is important that children are actively involved. One of the key issues is to listen to children and to give them a voice and to ascertain how they feel about the setting and which activities they want to participate in (Hutchinson and Palaiologou, 2016). Observations are important in listening to children and involving them in the transitions. While observations are a useful tool for assessment, they also enable educators to listen to the children and understand their needs and to give the children a voice in their learning and development.

The United Nation's on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article12, states that children's views must be considered in all matters affecting him or her (UNCRC, 1989). The voice of the child is articulated as a key principle in international education policy and practice contexts, ensuring that the child's voice is meaningfully included and responded to continues to be challenge education systems (Deegan, 2015).

A democratic education system acknowledges the importance of a child's voice and recognises that prioritising 'participation' enhances children's self-esteem and confidence, promotes their overall development, and develops children's sense of autonomy, independence, social competence, and resilience (Dewey 1916; Lansdown, 2005).

While including the voice of the child is articulated as a key principle in international education policy and practice contexts, ensuring that the child's voice is meaningfully included and responded to continues to challenge education systems (Deegan, 2015). Deegan

poses the question whether we are truly convinced of the value of child voice in our practice

(ibid).

Therefore, if we believe that a democratic education system presupposes that the voices of all

children, irrespective of age or ability are included and listened to, it requires us as

researchers to develop innovative and creative ways to capture and to respond to the voices of

all children (Ring., O'Sullivan, n/a).

Furthermore, this supports including children in the transition process. It highlights the

importance of children being adequately informed and consulted in matters that affect them.

Parent's Role

The Irish state acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is their parents

and family, and it guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide,

according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical, and social

education of their children (Bunreacht na hEireann, Article 42.1). In addition to this, Ireland

ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child in 1992. The convention

acknowledged, the primary role that parent's and the family have in the care and protection of

children as well as the state, (UNCRC, 1989).

Parents play an important role in the transition process and should be seen as important

collaborators in organising transitions (Griebel and Niesel, 2006, 2011; Margetts, 2007;

Reichman, 2012). In early years settings we recognise that children are capable and

competent they experience many changes they move in move up move through and move out

of lots of situations often guided by family culture policies and procedures and learning to

manage transitions/changes is an important skill that children require for emotional well-

being (O'Kane, 2016; Brooker, 2005). In terms of family involvement, Brooker (2005)

reminds us of the importance of respectful two-sided dialogue, between educators and parents.

When educators involve parents it is also important to remember that they themselves are also going through transitions (Hutchinson and Palaiologou, 2016). Parents are as strongly influenced by the "transition effect", as are their children and therefore it also needs to be acknowledged that parents feel anxious about their children's transitions. This is where settling in and phased transitions come into play especially at time of vertical transitions (Hutchinson, A., Palaiologou, I. 2016).

Research highlights the importance of making sure that we are prepared to support children during key transitions remembering that "transitions" is a process and not an event (Hard et al, 2010). An understanding of attachment theory helps us to relate to the ways that individual parents themselves might respond to the stress of their child's transitions. Elfer et al., (2012) refers to the 'triangle of trust and attachments", within the key person approach that includes the parents as well as the child. Creating that relationship by tuning into a parent's needs recognising their unique enthusiasms and motivations their skills and strengths as well as their anxieties and concerns is fundamental to the success of the approach. Involving parents and their children as much as possible build's reassurance and confidence in the transition process they are also the best people to help inform and support other new parents and their children at time of transition (O'Connor, 2018).

Early Years educators, Key worker Approach and the Caring Triangle

The role of the educators is to be a communicator, a facilitator, a coach, a role model, a storyteller, a good timekeeper, a researcher. (Meils, 2005) Educators are required to be professional, have skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that are appropriate to their role and responsibility. In transitions the educator's role is to support children to predict and cope

with change by providing reliable and stable relationships, continuity and care and secure base, (CECDE, 2006).

The key worker approach was proposed by Goldschmied and Elder (2002). They describe the key person approach as "a way of working with settings in which the focus and organisation is aimed at enabling and supporting close attachments between children and their educators" (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2003.18). The key person approach is used in many early childhood settings to help children to form secure attachments and to build close relationships with a key person. The use of this this approach means that each child is assigned a named person who is primarily responsible for creating a close relationship with the child and their family as they transition into early years settings (NCCA, 2009: Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2003). Elfer (2012) proposed that where possible, the early years setting would be flexible and respond to the needs of the family, as the child's main caregiver. This is especially relevant when the child is carrying out a transition such as vertical transitions for the first time, e.g. such as moving to a new pre-school setting. As this stage can be intense and emotionally demanding, it is important that educators or key persons have the knowledge, skills and support to ensure that the children make these   attachments (Bennett and Palaiologou, 2016).

Relationships form the basis of the key person role, with each child having a key person as their immediate point of contact, (Nikiforidiou and Anderson, 2016). The key worker role also supports familiarity and consistency at times of transition, which is important in reducing anxiety and stress levels as the child is reassured by the continued presence of the key person (O'Connor, 2018).

The key worker is fundamental to the success of any transition, (O'Connor, 2018). One way of achieving this key worker approach is through positive relationships and interactions between the educator (key person) and the child and their family, where the primary focus is

on the relationships and communications between the educator the child and their parents (Barnardos, 2016).

Brooker (2008) stresses the importance of relationships, between the child, parents and educators and she describes it as the "caring triangle". She identifies three key processes for effective planning. One is understanding routines in the setting and at home e.g., children's habits, routine, and children's interests. Second, is enjoying relationships and having pleasurable interactions with other children. Friendships within the setting should be encouraged amongst children and the third one highlights how it makes links with the outside world, "enabling environment", for example a family photograph on the wall or an object "like a teddy bear" Wincott (1986) describes such objects as "transitional objects", these objects comfort the child when separated from their loved ones.

Role of the Environment

Malaguzzi believed that social learning preceded cognitive development, (Gandini, 2012). He emphasised that the environment plays a central role in the process of making learning meaningful. So important was the notion, that Malaguzzi defined the environment as "the third teacher" (Gandini, 2011). Malaguzzi's third teacher is a flexible environment, responsive to the need for teachers and children to create learning together (Gandini, 2011). Malaguzzi looked at many different approaches to early childhood education, with the emphasis on the child, the setting (environment) and the parents (Malaguzzi, 1993). Environment and routines that encourage shared endeavour, or special time for small groups are invaluable for children building new friendships and developing a sense of security following a transition (Patel, 2022).

Cassidy (2005) conceptualises the differences in the learning environments between settings and the potential pressures and anxieties that may be exacerbated by such young children

(Cassidy, 2005). The importance of continuity within and between settings must be recognised, in terms of learning experiences, relationships and in the physical differences such as the class size, adult and child ratios. This necessitates a common language and understanding regarding transitions (Brostrom, 2002; Fabian and Dunlop, 2002; O'Kane and Hayes, 2006).

Irish Policy, curriculum, and quality frameworks

Over the past two decades there has been an unprecedented amount of change in policy directives which have had a direct impact on early years provision.

In an Irish context, Siolta (The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education) was developed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (CECDE, 2009). Its purpose was to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of childcare.

This document set out an overall vision on how standards should be met in practice. Standard (13): transitions: proposes that educators ensure continuity of experiences for children, this requires policies and procedures that promote the sensitive management of transitions, consistency in key relationships, liaison between home and the setting and involving parents and other relevant professional (CECDE, 2009). Also Standard 7: Curriculum, to encourage each child's holistic development and learning and that the curriculum approach is flexible.

Aistear (The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework) highlights the importance of supportive and smooth transitions in early childhood (NCCA, 2009) through supportive partnerships with parents helping children to adjust to their new routines and helping the child to learn through a curriculum that supports children's learning and development.

In the past two years, the Irish Government have unveiled The First Five Strategy. This is a whole-of-Government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their

families. This ten-year plan was announced in 2019, with an objective to make sure all

children have positive early experiences to get a great start in life

(DCYA, 2022).

This strategy acknowledges the impact that positive transitions have for young children's

learning and development and emphasises the importance of supporting the child as they

navigate their way through the education continuum, (DCYA, 2022). The document states,

"that to support positive transitions we need to understand that the transitions from one

environment to another is an important milestone for children" (LINC, 2021).

This policy document sets out to reform of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) system; to

improve affordability, accessibility and quality. By moving progressively towards a graduate

led professional ELC workforce. Under objective eight it states that children will have safe,

high-quality developmentally appropriate, integrated ELC which reflects the diversity of

needs. It states a curriculum that recognises learning and care forms "an inseparable whole",

offers opportunities for play, exploration and active participation by children and their

parents, and is responsive to children's interests and abilities is also an essential component of

quality, (DCYA, 2022). While objective nine states that children will be supported in their

transitions to (and through) ELC settings and onwards to primary schooling; this document

also sets out to enhance current policy and frameworks and the First five states that Aistear,

the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework is a core action of the *First 5*. Aistear is

designed to support parents, early childhood educators and teachers in planning for and

providing enriching, challenging and enjoyable learning opportunities for children. Both

Aistear and Siolta advocate the development of an emergent and inquiry based curriculum, as

it evolves, as choices and connections are made by the children as they discover the world

around them. The educator shares control with the children and their actions, play, thoughts

and conversations to guide the curriculum planning.

Conclusion

To conclude, this literature review has highlighted some pivotal points on the relevance of relationships and attachment theory and its importance on how transitions take place in early years settings. It also highlights the importance of engaging with policy makers, managers and educators in the transition debate. We should be challenged and as educators in the field, being proactive in finding solutions to the daily challenges of transitions faced by the children is crucial within our role. Transitions continue to be inevitable, having multiple carers working in shifts, or dealing with different aspects of care, in the natural course of the day, they need to ensure they provide a continuity of care and to respect the role that relationships play in the process of transitions. The literature also reminds us of the key role played by educators and parents in supporting children to predict and cope with change and transition.

Methodology

Chapter Three:

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe, justify and explain the methodology process undertaken

for this study. These are often theoretically informed while providing a purposeful framework

in which to gain as much information and knowledge as possible from the study (Ryan,

2015).

This chapter will discuss the selected research methodology and methods used in this thesis. It

will discuss in detail, such topics as the research question, self-study action research, self-

study action research paradigm, Kemmis and McTaggart Spiral Model of Action Research

(1988) and critical reflection. Following this, I will disuses the recruitment and participation

process, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and the limitations of this

research.

Research Question

My research question of *"How can I support smooth transitions for children in my pre-school*

setting? came about as I was considering both my ontological and epistemological values.

Ones' epistemological values are defined as the theory, validation and justification of

knowledge (McDonagh et al, 2016). Ontological values relate to how one sees oneself in

relation to others (Whitehead 2015a: McNiff and Whitehead 2006). I had originally planned

to research "how can I support social and emotional well-being through transitions", however

after reflecting and observing my practices, I recognised that I was what Jack Whitehead

coined a "*living contradiction*" (Whitehead, 2019, p.9). I was not living my values; I was not

offering the child in my setting voice at times of transitions. Parents too were impacted by my

practices, and I felt that I was not living to my values of children's rights. Therefore, I had to alter my practices in line with my values.

I value respectful relationships with colleagues, children and their parents and cultivating a collegial environment which enhances the lives of children in it. I also believe that knowledge is socially constructed among peers, with each person is experience contributing to collective learning. To enhance my practice by aligning it with my values, I embarked upon this journey through a self-study action research project.

Research Approach

An action research approach was used when undertaking this study as it focuses on the self and one's practice (McNiff, 2002). A qualitative research methodology for gathering the data was adopted for this study.

Self-Study Action Research Paradigms

Paradigms, a term coined by Kuhn (1962) is used to narrate ones' world views and philosophical assumptions. It is a lens in which one identifies a phenomenon and attempts to explain, interpret and describe it to gain more knowledge. Cohen at al (2011) describes paradigm as a way of looking at, or researching, a shared belief system or a set of principles. Paradigms provide beliefs and dictates, which, for scholars in a particular discipline, influence what should be studied and how it should be interpreted (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017; 26). One's choice of paradigm is strongly associated with ones', ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions and values, with Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 6) describing paradigms as a "net which hold all values and assumptions together".

Bassey (1990) suggests that there are three main types of paradigms of research, 'a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the functions of research, which adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the patterns of their thinking and underpins their research actions. This is important as each paradigm of research, as it is grounded in our different values, beliefs about the nature of reality and beliefs about the nature of education (Sullivan et al, 2016; 24). Morrison, (2007) suggests that, as researchers we make sense of the research data, we draw both implicitly or explicitly upon a set of beliefs about how their analysis might be understood (Bassey 1990).

Self-Study Action Research

Self-study Action Research (AR) has become increasingly popular in the field of education and is sometimes known as the 'practitioner as researcher model' (Campbell et al, 2004). Action research embraces the idea that each researcher is informed by their own values, norms and assumptions. Action researchers work in different ways in different contexts and settings, and the action research approach provides practitioners researchers with a way of studying their own work in order to understand it better as they begin to try to make some systematic improvement on it. McNiff emphasises the centrality of self-reflection to action research because she argues, "Action research is an enquiry conducted by the self into the self" (McNiff, 2002a: n/p). Each practitioner using this research approach thinks about their own life and work, asking themselves why they do the things they do and why they are the way they are (ibid). Kemmis (2009:463) suggests that "action research has the potential to change people's practices, their understanding of their practices, and the conditions under which they practice". Action research, he says, can change people's patterns of "saying", "doing" and "relating" to form new patterns and new ways of life. In other words, Kemmis argues, action research can be "a meta-practice: a practice that changes other practices".

This form of research is particularly relevant in educational practice. Roche (2020) states, that self-study AR plays a significant role in enhancing one's practice, as the researcher gains more knowledge in relation to their practice and can align one's values, as both, are heavily considered in the research process. This is termed the "Living Theory Approach" (Whitehead, 2019: 3) as the rationale of educational influences are produced by the researcher from the learning from others. This relates to the research element of AR, as one develops a theory in relation to their practices which can then be disseminated. Kemmis and Taggart (1992) state that this can occur even within a small-scale study through the involvement of others from within the community.

As the name suggests, a core element of AR is the synchronised application of action and research. The action element consists of the predetermined intervention such as an activity to resolve an issue or to bring about change. This recognised need to change may relate to pedagogical practice or educational leadership (Burns, 2005). This occurs through the process of the AR cycle. There are many different models or cycles of AR since the process first emerged, however, the core components remain. These were developed by Lewin (1946) who is considered as the father of AR. He believed that there were four stages to the process: plan, act, observe, reflect (Cohen et al., 2018). Similarly, Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) developed the spiral model of AR. For this research study, I implemented the Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) model, illustrated in Figure 3.1. Traditionally this model is spiral, with one cycle leading into the other, but in action research it acknowledges that in reality action research is quite messy.

I found the same thing within my research as I was in the middle of cycle one when cycle two emerged. I have previously used this cycle and have found it to be practical and beneficial in its application. Koshy (2010) stated that the Kemmis and McTaggart's (1998) spiral model offers researchers the opportunity to engage with the phenomenon at a deeper level on each cycle and so it can lead to a greater depth of understanding.
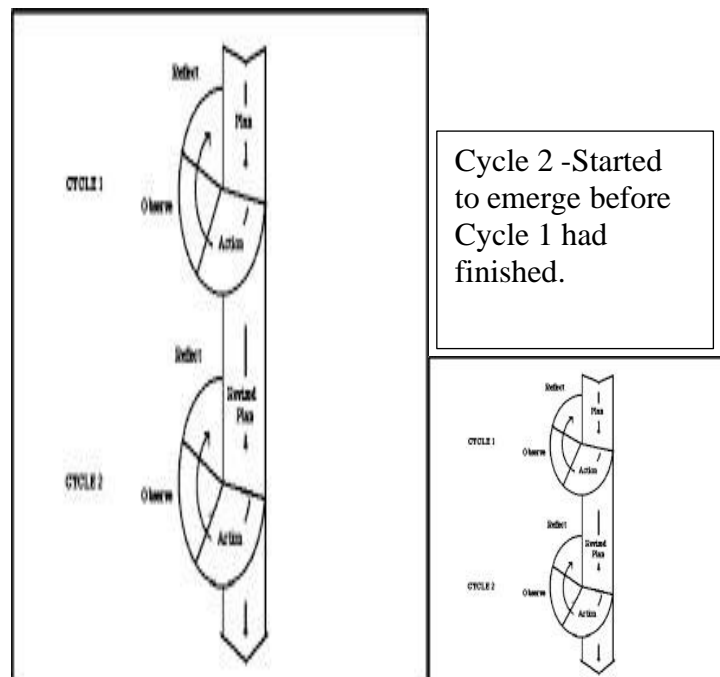
Figure 3.1 Kemmis and McTaggart spiral Model of Action Research (1988) Both cycles
running concurrently.

Kemmis and McTaggart Spiral Model of Action Research (1988)

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) describe self-study AR, as a means of improving ones

understandings of their practices, and the conditions under which they practice. By actively

engaging in the research as a subject, one can gain a more lived experience of the daily

dynamics of the practice to acquire a greater depth of knowledge thereby improving their

practice (Kemmis, 2012). The process of AR is to firstly identify an area of concern or

interest, such as a tension between ones' values and ones' practice (Roche, 2020). The next

course of action is to plan for an intervention to support the necessary change. One must then

implement the intervention and observe the effects both during and afterwards. Reflection

54

plays a fundamental role in self-study Action Research, not only in the development of the interaction but on oneself throughout the process. Kemmis (2012) states that educational praxis, an idea which is then transformed into action, can only occur through both reflection and action. Finally, because of the researcher's observations and reflection of the intervention and the input of the other participants, the sequence of planning begins again (Kemmis et al., 2014: McNiff, 2017).

This model of self-study AR suggests that the process of AR is linear in that the research follows the sequence of steps to engage in the process. However, many authors, including aforementioned theorists, who developed this model state that the process of self-study AR is a notoriously messy process (Kemmis et al., 2014; McDonagh et al., 2020). However, Cook (2009) argues that it is through the messiness of self-study Action Research that new knowledge and transformative practice is formed.

Critical Reflection

The central role of reflection in self-study AR has been noted by many researchers and theorists (Roche, 2020; McNiff, 2017; Conboy and Donnellann, 2015; Costello et al., 2015), as one does not learn through experience alone.

Gibbs states that through reflection the potential learning can be enriched, (Gibbs, 1988). Reflection affords us a space in which to take stock of experiences (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Dewey 1933; Kolb 1984; Schon 1983). The pivotal role of reflection in self-study AR has been documented by many researchers and theorists (McNiff, 2017; Hayes et al, 2014; Larrivee 2000). Each educator must find their own way to becoming or being reflective, acknowledging that some people are naturally more introspective and reflective than others. There is a clear distinction between reflective practice and critical reflection.

Definitions of reflection vary but all agree that reflection is about learning. Moon (2001b: 2) says that "Reflection is a form of mental processing- like a form of thinking that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome"; she also states that "reflection can be deep and transformative". Brookfield (2012) suggests that the basis of critical reflection is "the basic process of critical thinking", arguing that if educators cannot think critically their survival is "in peril". Therefore, if you cannot think critically, you will have no chance of recognising, let alone pushing back on those times you are being manipulated, and if you cannot think critically, you will behave in ways that have less chance of achieving the results you want.

Critical reflection is the continued and considered process of recognising and examining the accuracy and legitimacy of ones' educational assumptions. Some of these assumptions are explicit in that we are aware of them, and some are implicit in the way that we are unaware of them and their implications on our educational practices (Brookfield, 2017). Brookfield (2017) states that when one considers the perspectives of others, it enhances their learning while also challenging their educational assumptions.

Sampling

My research was a small-scale self-study action research project. Before I started to conduct my research, I contacted the directors and the management of the early years' setting. I spoke to them about wanting to carry out my research in all four of their preschool rooms. I explained to them what my research entailed, and I furnished them with the information sheet and the permission letters. (Appendix 1,2,5).

Due to the COVID 19 Pandemic and with the rise in COVID numbers over the winter break, the setting had a strict no mixing of play pods policy to adhere to public safety guidelines. Play pods were introduced to the EYS after the re-opening in early June 2020. Play pods were

an alternative to social distancing, to limit the number of contacts and facilitate contact tracing within the EYS (DCYA, 2021). The setting assigned me to a particular play pod, known as Zone D. This meant that my original research plan had to be altered and reviewed to ensure that I avoided mixing between the different pre-school rooms and to reduce the risk of spreading Covid 19 within the facility.

I had originally hoped to ask all 22 participants to participate in my research, as this would have allowed for a reduction of numbers should some choose not to participate or to opt in or at a later stage opt out. In AR there is also an ethical dimension to inviting everyone to take part in that nobody was silenced or excluded by the sampling strategy (McDonagh et al, 2016).

Therefore, I could not involve all staff within the setting, as I was not permitted to enter certain play pods within the setting. Out of twenty-two educators, I was only permitted to work with six EYE from zone D (Appendices: 3,5) I sought and gained their permission. This signified that I would be working with a smaller group of participants than I had previously hoped for. This was unfortunate but out of my control, due to the current Public Health emergency. Once I gained the permission from the educators, I then sought the permission from 13 parents and 7 children. I also enlisted the help of two critical friends (Appendix: 4,5,7,8,9). Through dialogue, I was able to clarify my thinking, to develop an understanding and to generate new questions, that I required to become a critical thinker (Sullivan et al, 2016: 52). Bohm (2004) talks about dialogue in terms of the flow of understanding that emerges between and through people. This relates with Brookfield's (2017) theory on critically reflecting through different lenses, one being that of colleagues, which can support the researcher in becoming aware of elements of their practice which they were previously unaware of.

<u>Data Collection</u>

McDonagh (2016) states that the data and the collection of same, should be sensible, practical and relevant to your research and practice. Collecting data provides us with the evidence of the changes that we make to our practice, it shows how closely we are living to our values, and we generate evidence to support our claim to knowledge and show what is true. Self - study Action Research (AR) traditionally lends itself to qualitative data collection (Cohen et al, 2018), which is associated with the feelings and opinions of the participants of the research. In contrast, quantitative data collection is based on what can be measured and written down with numbers, which can be statistically analysed. McNiff and Whitehead (2011) states that we need to show why, and for what purpose, we are carrying out our actions. I decided to use observations, questionnaires, team meetings and my reflective journal to demonstrate rigorous ways to make explicit things that I know or assume as facts, about teaching and learning. McDonagh et al, (2012) states that teachers need to focus their research lens on their own teaching and practice, the reflective journal and the learner record books helps to follow the process of my thinking and learning. My claim to knowledge will be drawn from the stories of my learning throughout the research process. Moon (2006) and Anderson and Herr (2009) describe the use of the researcher's reflective journal as a qualitative form of data. Critical colleagues provided data that contributed to triangulation, by cross-checking my work from different perspectives I could show accuracy and validity of information that I had gathered through the focus group, observations and interviews. Triangulation can explain more fully the richness and complexity of the changes you have made because they are viewed from more than one standpoint (Cohen et al, 2011) and so give more a detailed and balanced picture (Altrichter et al. 2008). All data that was collected is stored in a locked filling cabinet. Information that was uploaded electronically has been stored in a folder that is password protected and encrypted securely. All data will be stored in

accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (2016) and Maynooth University Data

Protection Procedure (Maynooth University, 2018) for a period of ten years.

Data collection Instruments

Multiple data collection instruments were applied during this study. The methods included:

anecdotal and event sample observations, critical friends, interviews, reflective journal, team

meetings, conversations with children and parents and questionnaires with parents and

educators. I observed these approaches of data collection to be the most suitable for obtaining

the required information for the research question. Sullivan et al., (2016) state that ways of

collecting qualitative data in research often grow as the actions develop to suit the specific

circumstances, location and participants.

Critical Friend: SSARN requires dialogue, ideas, collaboration from others "who provide

support as well as constructively challenge and critique" (Lassonde, Galman & Kosnik, 2009;

Sullivan, et al., 2016:28). Therefore, it was vital to have two critical friend(s) throughout this

research project to ensure an all-inclusive study. Both critical friends were colleagues of

mine. They were both able to give me valuable insights into my practices and they also

supported me to engage in critical reflection and to question my practices (Sullivan et al,

2016).

Semi-structured interview with educators were used to gain information from the six EYE

participants. This technique elicits concerns and interest of the research participants; non

standardised, personalised information about how the participants view the world (Cohen et

al, 2018). I used a questionnaire guide to ensure a regularised approach. According to

Roberts-Holmes (2014) there is more opportunity for the respondent to expand and talk more

about areas which specifically interest them. This meant that the semi-structured nature of

the interviews meant the discussions remained conversational, whilst following a clear
discussion guide.

"Observations are more than looking. It is looking and noting systemically people,
behaviours, events, artefacts, routines" (Cohen et al., 2018: 542). One of the key features of
observation during the research process is that it enables the researcher to collect "live" data
from natural settings or "everyday social settings and their behaviours in them", in this case in
the EYS (Cohen, Manion &Morrison, 2011:465). According to Wellington (2015)
observations as a research process gives the researcher the opportunity to collect first-hand
data from naturally occurring social situations. This gives the investigator an opportunity to
detect directly what is happening "in situ" rather than referring to second-hand information
(Cohen et al., 2011). As children were in their natural setting, they were unaware of the
observations taking place and therefore the researcher got a true and valid observation. I
decided to carry out anecdotal and event sample observations. Anecdotal observations offered
me a story about the child, a factual account of an incident, the precise sequence of event is
documented using descriptive language whereas event sampling, involves observation of
targeted behaviours or specific events, such as times of transition. Observations were taken of
the children talking, interacting with other children or/and with the researcher and interacting
with the props and resources. The children were coded by number to ensure confidentiality.
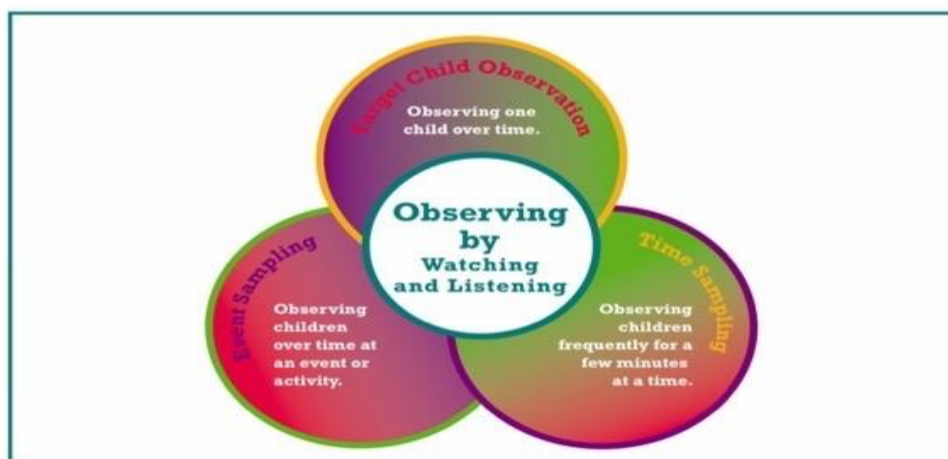
Figure 3.2 Types of observation

Conversational interviews are used to "generate verbal data through talking about specific topics with research participants in an informal and conversational way" (Given, 2008:2). Denscombe (2010: 174) states that interviews provide detailed in-depth responses, and the feelings and experiences of respondents can be fully explored. Conversational interviews took place between the educator-researcher and the children during the preschool ECCE session. Conversational interviews between the educator-researcher and the EYE participants and the parents, mostly happened at the end or at the start of the ECCE session. Cohen et al. (2018) remind us that when interviewing children, it is important to engage them in a safe context and not to interrogate them or pressure them for information. I spoke to the children using language that was age appropriate. The children's responses and comments were noted by the researcher.

The use of a reflective journal in a SSAR project enhances the reflective process thus exploring the importance of critical thinking (Sullivan et al., 2016: 41). Reflection is a tool or an approach one uses to understand one's practice, what Schon referred to as 'reflection on practice' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 15, 51) Alhadeff (2003: n/p) suggests that critical reflection 'is the capacity to challenge the assumptions through which one gives meaning to one's own experience following a purpose of emancipation'. Being a reflection practitioner enables one to become more involved in the research itself by including one's own thoughts and opinions,

therefore the researcher is studying their own lives rather that the lives of others (McNiff, 2002). Using a reflective journal enabled me to examine my practice more closely and identify areas for improvement. I documented entries daily based on discussions, thoughts, interactions, observations, activities and on practices which had taken place.

Team meetings were carried out with six EYE participants to gain an insight into how I could improve my transition practices. Following from the baseline data collection questionnaire, I set up a CoP with the EYE Participants. Wenger (1998) states that such communities of practice would contribute to the expansion of your educational influence. As I was holding the meeting, I was seen as the leader. An effective leader needs to be aware of the type of team they are managing but also the stage their team is at to help them work cohesively and successfully.

Daly et al. (2004) suggest that there are characteristics of an effective team, including a sense of purpose, a balance of roles, commitment from team members and effective leadership and good communication. Edgington (2014) highlights the need for the leader to be aware of the type of team they are managing because it will affect the behaviour of the individuals involved. Bloom (2000) citied in Dunlop (2008) suggested that leaders need to have knowledge of a range of subjects including, organizational theory, child development and pedagogy.

Conversations with parents and children: Data such as conversations with parents, educators and children were all part of this research along with comments from educators, parents, and children. Sullivan et al, 2016: 80). I recorded such conversations in my reflective journal.

Overview of the Research Design of this study

Cycle 1
- Contact BOD & receive consent for research
- Collect Consent/assent from parents/child/EYE participants
- Semi-Structured Baseline Questionnaire for EYE
- Carry out anecdotal & event sample observations on the children
- Meet with Critical Friends
- Reflective Journal - gather infomration
- Set up a CoP with EYE participants and have team meetings.

Cycle 2
- Cylce 2 - Overlapped with cycle one
- Frequent meeting wiht critical friends
- Carry out event sample observations
- Carry out team meeting with EYE participants
- AistearSiolta Template to reflect on our practices
- Team meetings
- Data analysis

Figure 3.3 Timeline and Overview of Interventions

Timeline and Overview of Intervention

Sharing of the research with the EYE Participants and collecting consent and assent began in

January 2022. Cycle one began 14th January 2022, Cycle Two overlapped with

Cycle one, it began on the 4th of February. Data analysis took place between the 13[th of]

May 2022 to 29th June 2022. From the start of this research journey, I have been

gathering information about myself and my values and thoughts and I have noted them in a

reflective journal. To effectively document ones' learning during the reflection process, it is

recommended that one uses a journal (Moon, 2004; Glenn 2006; Trodd, 2016). Throughout the

research process, from my initial task of articulating my ontological and epistemological

values, I have used a reflective journal. I will be using the Kemmis McTaggart Action Research

Cycle (1988). AR is also termed as a narrative form of research, which is a personal account of

events which the researcher experiences. This paper is written in the first person, reflective in

its analysis and typically emotional laden (Cohen et al, 2018). This form of data offers key

insights into my learning and practice, while also ensuring that I lived to my values (McDonagh

et al, 2016).

Thematic Analysis

The method I used within the data was thematic. This form of data analysis is commonly used

within qualitative data methods (Cohen et al, 2018). Thematic analysis is the process of

identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that it

is the first qualitative method that should be learned as "it provides core skills what will be

useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis". These are seen in Figure 3.3.below.

Thematic analysis is a "method for identifying, reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun

& Clarke, 2006: 79). By using this form of analysis, it enables the researcher to report the data

set as well as interpreting some elements of the phenomenon and making sense of the data

presented (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Unlike other qualitative

methods of data analysis, thematic analysis is not connected to a certain epistemological or

theoretical position, therefore enabling this form of analysis to be a flexible process (Maguire

& Delahunt, 2017).

My first step in analysing the data was to establish how to transcribe the data that was

collected. I decided to type the data and to use Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-Phase

Framework of Thematic Analysis; this was applied in a systematic way to the study. Using a

systematic approach to data analysis can be "transparently communicated to other"

(Sandelowski, 1995; Malterud, 2001; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Once patterns

and themes were identified in the data, they were then applied to the research question to

establish if they represent something important (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt,

2017).

| Step 1 Become familiar with the data | Step 2 Generate initial codes | Step 3 Search for themes | Step 4 Review Themes | Step 5 Define and name themes | Step 6 Produce the report |
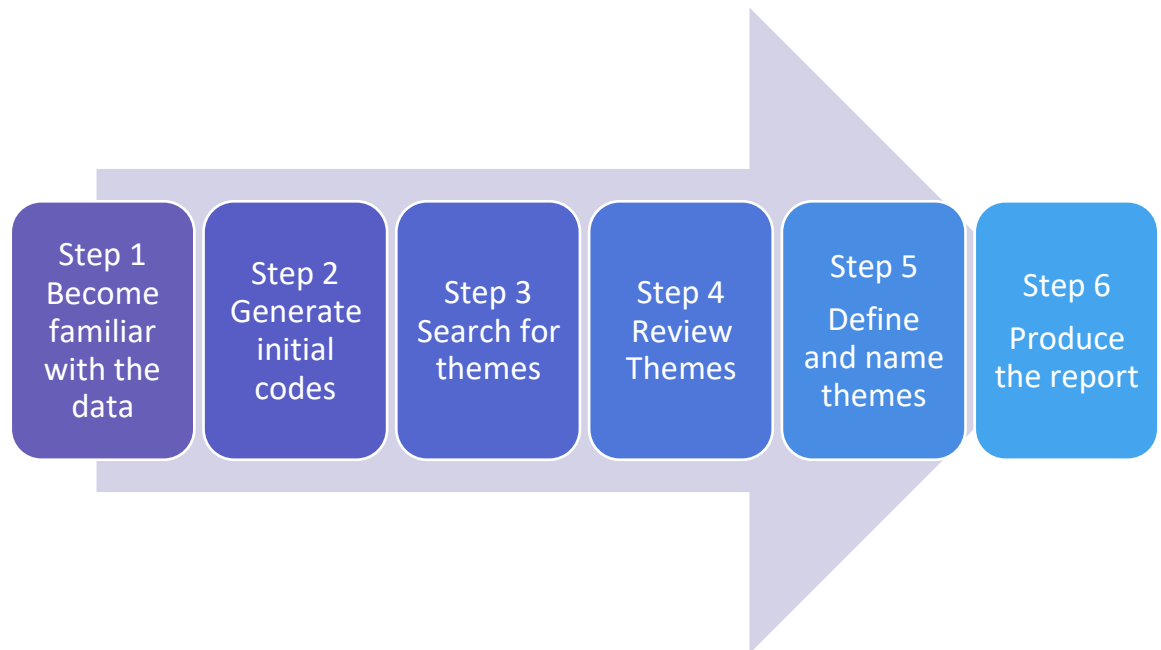
Figure 3.4 Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-Phase Framework of Thematic Analysis

Reliability and Validity

To demonstrate reliability, I enlisted the support of two critical friends, these colleagues along

with the data gathered from research participants and the literature, or secondary data related

to my topic, would add rigour to my research and support the validation and reliability of my

data through triangulation (McDonagh,2020). A variety of triangulation approaches will not

only help to validate the accuracy of the research, but also provides me with innovative ways

to analyse your new learning from your action research project and shows openness to

critique and challenge (McDonagh et al, 2016:107). Triangulation can explain more fully the

richness and complexity of the changes you have made because they are viewed from more

than one standpoint (Cohen et al. 2011) and so give a more detailed and balanced picture

(Altrichter et al, 2008).

However, validity of one research or one's claim to knowledge and an enhancement of ones' practice is validated through ones' values being enacted upon within practice and demonstrating how this is occurring through their data (McNiff, 2017). It is my responsibility to be truthful and authentic in documenting my research journey, rather than provide a narrative of victory (McDonagh et al., 2016), but to encourage the participants of my research to do the same. Habermas (1976) believed that by examining how understandings between people develop, understanding happens when what is being said is agreed to be valid (Sullivan et al, 2016:103). I also believe that knowledge is constructed socially. Thus, to live these values in my practice, I must recognise them and embody them in my research. Reliability and Validity are honoured in different ways in Action Research than in traditional research. AR seeks to decentralize strategies for specific issues, providing answers that impact and enhance all the people involved in the research.

Ethical considerations

As in all research undertakings, there is an onus on the researcher to protect their research participants (Denscombe, 2010a, 2010b; Guthrie, 2010; Creswell, 2009). There is a need for all researchers to be aware of any ethical concerns in their research to ensure any concerns are addressed. Creswell (2009) highlights the need for all participants in the research to be aware of the intent and purpose of the research, and how their contribution may be interpreted or used. This research complied with Maynooth University (MU) code of ethics. The Code of Professional Responsibility and the Code of Ethics for Early Years in the Department of children and Youth Affairs (2020) sets out to guide the values and ethics which underpins the duties and responsibilities of early years educators, regardless of their role. This document provided me with a reference point in guiding my day-to-day decision making and practices. It outlined that as an early years professional, I have responsibilities to adopt and act in accordance with an ethical code of practice (DCYA, 2020).

To ensure that all participants will be voluntary and that all participants will be well informed

about the research under study I have taken the following steps (Sarantakos,

2005). Letters were sent to the Directors and Managers of the Early Years Setting

(EYS) to gain formal access to possible respondents (see appendix 1) letter to the

Director/Manager).

All participants were provided with a detailed description of the study, its purpose, and the

procedures (Appendix 5), as well as the main interview questions guide prior to the

interviews (Appendix 9). Informed consents were also gained from all participants.

Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to the participants, their names were not

used in the research and in the participants' responses presented in the findings chapter.

Informed consent

Prior to my research process beginning, all prospective participants and gate keepers were given

information letters. Once the participants agreed to take part in the research, they signed consent

forms. Throughout the process, all participants were reminded that they were partaking in the

research in a voluntary capacity, and they could withdraw at any stage. The rationale for the

research, selected methodology and time frame were also discussed with the participants to

ensure they were fully informed, (Appendix 6,7,8) (Cohen et al., 2018).

The UNCRC (1989) states that children should be involved in decisions that affect them. They

have a voice, and it should be taken seriously in an age-appropriate manner. Assent is required

for person under the age of eighteen who cannot legally consent alone to their participation in

research, assent is required. Lewis (2002) states that child assent is the capability of the child to

make a choice about their participation. As one of my core values is children's rights, I felt that

it was important that I receive the children's assent. In terms of the participant within this

research project, assent is not enough to allow the child to partake it must coincide with the

guardian's consent. Under the current Children's First guidelines, we as teacher researchers,

may avoid risks to our young participants by employing a child-cantered, inclusive approaches according to *Children's First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Ireland, DCYA, 2011).

The information and assent for the children was put in simple, child friendly, ageappropriate language as well as adequate information regarding the methods and possible outcomes of the research outlined (DCYA, 2011).

I sought permission from each child and their parents in the pre-school, by asking them to write their name on the form (Appendix 8). As some of the children were under four, they marked the page using their mark making skills (creation of different patterns, lines, or shapes on a page). Each child was offered the opportunity to be part of the research project. I spoke with the children at their developmental level, informing them that I was writing a story about them in their pre-school. I then questioned 'Did they want to be part of it?'. They all agreed. Both written and verbal consent was granted by checking in with the child/children in moment-to moment experiences.

Children have the power and authority to refuse any work from being presented in this research project. Participating children also have rights under the Data Protection Acts, as do their parents (Government of Ireland, 2014). All participants enlisted in the research project, voluntarily gave their permission to engage in this research and I explained to them that they could disengage with the research at any point, and that all their data would be destroyed. All participants were informed of who was going to be viewing the data collected, naming my supervisor, the course co-ordinator, and the external examiner.

Power

The issue of power relationship between the researcher and the respondents is one that I am strongly aware of. Freire (2003) stipulated that critical reflection on one's practice should not

be confined to questions about teaching methodologies or practical issues alone. It is important for educators to develop their own awareness of issues of power, oppression and culture in the different aspects of education. Brookfield (2009) echoes these ideas and suggests that "critical reflection calls into question the power relations that allow or promote one particular set of practices over others" (ibid.:294). One of the main ethical considerations is the power imbalance, as I was the manager of the setting, up until very recently.

Therefore, I must ensure that the participants feel they can be truthful in their responses throughout the data collection. They may feel obliged to respond in a manner that favours the researcher as participants are considered as a data source (Sullivan, 2020). When this research concludes, the findings and complete research document will be shared with them to offer them the opportunity to learn (McNiff, 2017: McDonagh et al., 2016). As the researcher, I too am vulnerable to the power of others, as it is my practices which are being critiqued (McDonagh, 2016; Anderson and Herr, 2009). Consequently, I must manage and reflect on these experiences of vulnerability and critique by engaging with my critical friends and supervisor.

Authenticity:

Winters (2002) suggests that 'persuasiveness or authenticity might be used as criteria to judge the value of action research reports, he states that "a research report has 'authenticity'", epistemological validity and cultural authority when it gives direct expression to the "genuine voice", which really belongs to those whose life-words are being described' (ibid.:145). Therefore, it is not only my responsibility to be truthful and authentic in documenting my research journey, rather than furnishing a narrative of victory (McDonagh et al.,2020), but to encourage the participants to do the same. As previously stated, I value, care, inclusion, children's right and children's voices and relationships among colleagues, children, and their parents and for a collegial environment for all. I also believe that knowledge is constructed

socially. Thus, to live these values in my practice, I must recognise them and embody them within my research.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are both a pivotal in protecting the participants identity and protecting them from any harm, participants will also be aware of their right to withdrawal at any stage, throughout the process. The researcher's role is to ensure that the research site and the participants of the research remain confidential. The anonymity of the participants must be ensured when collecting data, particularly qualitative data, as many responses can be personal. By removing direct identifiers and using pseudonyms this was achieved (Cohen et al., 2018). All data, pertaining to the child, their parents/guardians and educators and other stakeholders will be discussed and later transcribed. It was anonymised to ensure confidentiality. The issue of confidentiality and anonymity must also be addressed. with the participants being fully informed of the purpose of the research and their role within the study.

Denscombe (2010a) suggests not only do these procedures protect the participants, but they also lend strength to the integrity of the research.

Throughout the research, participants remained anonymous, specific geographical locations were not mentioned, childcare services approached to request parents to participate in the enquiry were not named and the names mentioned throughout the interviews, observations, learning records were all changed in the transcription process.

Limitations

Limitations are described as shortcomings that cannot be either controlled or are the result of the restrictions imposed by the researcher. By acknowledging the limitations of this study, it opens opportunities to further the research again and to expand on the literature which is already

currently available. One of the limitations I feel is that it is essential to avoid a position where the participants think they are friends as this could affect the information that was been conveyed (Charleton, 2014).

Conclusion

This chapter has described in detail the research methodology and methods, used to answer my research question, *"How can I support smooth transitions for children in my early years setting?* As stated, this question came about through the identification and articulation of owning of my values through observing and reflecting on my practice. I plan to gather data and to make interventions in the coming weeks and months.

Data Analysis

Chapter Four

Introduction

This chapter formally presents and analyses the qualitative data gathered from the various

data collection tools. All data collected for the purpose of this self-study ARP originated

from reflective journaling, time samples and anecdotal observations of children,

questionnaires with educators and parents, team meetings with EYE participants, interviews

with EYE and conversations with children, their parents and my two critical friends. The

first section of this chapter identifies the themes and patterns emerging from the various data

sources. These themes and patterns are then synthesised into my key findings which relate

back to my research question, "*How can I support smooth transitions in my early years*

setting". Finally, the various challenges are discussed in detail. By overcoming these

challenges, I noted a shift in my thinking and in my pedagogical enhancement which is

elaborated later in this chapter.

Baseline

Transitions can bring up many exciting and difficult feelings for children, families, and

educators. Relationships, emotion, attachment, love, trust, respect and communication among

the group were all key features (O'Connor, 2016). Transitions are eased by the children's

experiences of reliable, stable, continuous and loving relationships (CECDE, 2006).

Therefore, to gain an understanding of how my current transitions practices were perceived

with participants, I issued a questionnaire (Appendix 9) to the EYE participants from zone D.

The questionnaire was semi-structured as this method of data collection can provide more of a

detailed response from the EYE participants.

However, it can also prove challenging when analysing the findings (Mathers et al.,

2009). Four out of the six early years educators (EYE) completed the questionnaires.

To further enhance my baseline, I decided to crosscheck my work using different

perspectives and to show accuracy and validity of the data that I had gathered (Sullivan,

2016). I decided that I would carry out anecdotal and time sample observations on children in

the preschool classroom over a three hour period for an entire week (Appendix 12,13). The

purpose of these observations was to obtain information on and about the children, to gain a

rich picture of the children in their natural environment.

I also utilised my reflective journal as a method of baseline data collection. As this method

offers ways of showing how I could collect data in terms of reflections on my practice.

Loughran (2006:85) states that a reflective journal can become, "a window into your

pedagogical thoughts and actions". Similarly, Phelps (2005) states that reflective journals are

not only a vital component in gathering qualitative data, regarding the perspectives of others, but

it also offers substantial learning for the researcher which may not be attainable from other

methods of data collection. I documented my thoughts in my reflective journal.

"How can I leverage relationships with educators and parents to support positive transitions

in my early years setting?", Do I need to consider my practices and how children transition

into and around the setting. (Reflective Journal entry, 13th January 2022).

The data findings highlighted, that the initial morning transition from the outdoor to the

indoor environment were interfering with both relationship building and smooth transition.

While I observed positive, nurturing relationships between the children and the educators, I

also observed children in distress, at times of transition. While some children were able to

handle the transition, others struggled and became tearful and frustrated. Additionally, I

observed children's voices being impeded by adults during times of transition. An example

taken from observation three.

"Can we play",

 "Listen to me",

"After circle can we play",

"I want to play with Hugo".

(Participant Child 4, Date: 9th January 2022).

Through analysing the data from the questionnaires, observations and reflective journal entries, I realised that I was in fact what Jack Whitehead coined "a living contradiction" (1989). I was not living my values, of children's voice and children's rights, I realised I was doing the opposite, I was not listening to what the children wanted. I was hindering their agency and their independence. I documented my thoughts in my reflective journal.

"My practices need to change, I am not living my values of children's voice", I must consider ways to enhance my practices". The children are telling me and showing me, they are not happy, I need to listen to them". Today I had to coax a little boy into the setting, he was quite clearly distressed coming into the setting. He threw himself onto the tarmacadam and shouted 'no', 'no', as I tried to comfort him, I asked him, "what's wrong?" and he shouted at me; "I just want to play outside". (Reflective Journal entry, Date:13th January 2022).

Additionally, I observed interactions between parents and educators to be strained and disjointed. There was a lack of interaction and communication between the educators and the parents partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I identified that children were experiencing multiple unnecessary mini transitions throughout their morning during the three hour ECCE session. Children were engaging in an abundance of scheduled adult led activities, such as circle-time, larger group time, adult-led art and crafts and adult led themed crafts for example (hibernation). These activities were impeding on how the children transitioned throughout the morning; children were given tasks to complete rather than choosing their own activities. One

of the questions I posed to the EYE participants was, 'What would they like to improve about the daily routine?' The findings from the question are illustrated below in Figure 4.1

Figure 4.1 Findings from the Questionnaire on how to enhance the daily routine.

The overall findings from the questionnaire were consistent with that of the data collected from the observations on the children. The three emerging themes were the daily routine, parental involvement, and the emergent curriculum. These were all areas of my practice which I have neglected. When reflecting upon my findings of the baseline data, I needed to consider why I had failed to address these issues.

I wonder if I have been so caught up in the whole COVID 19 pandemic, both personally and professionally that my professional practice has halted. I feel like I am always cleaning and making sure the environment is safe, I have sort of neglected my professional practices as I feel like I have no time to reflect due to the extra pressures of COVID 19 and the staffing crises within the setting (Reflective Journal entry, 21st January 2022).

While it is not uncommon for educators to report time constraints as having a negative impact on interactions and practices with each other, I needed to ensure that I took appropriate steps to try to remove these barriers to enhance my practice and to live my values. After speaking with my critical friends CD and MM, I decided that I would carry out a team meeting with the early years' educators. Due to the COVID 19 restrictions still in place at the time, I was only permitted to meet with six EY educators from the same play pod. I decided that this concept of a team meeting would be my first step to enhancing my practices while also engaging in communities of practice (CoP) with my fellow colleagues.

Emerging Themes of the Baseline Data Questionnaire
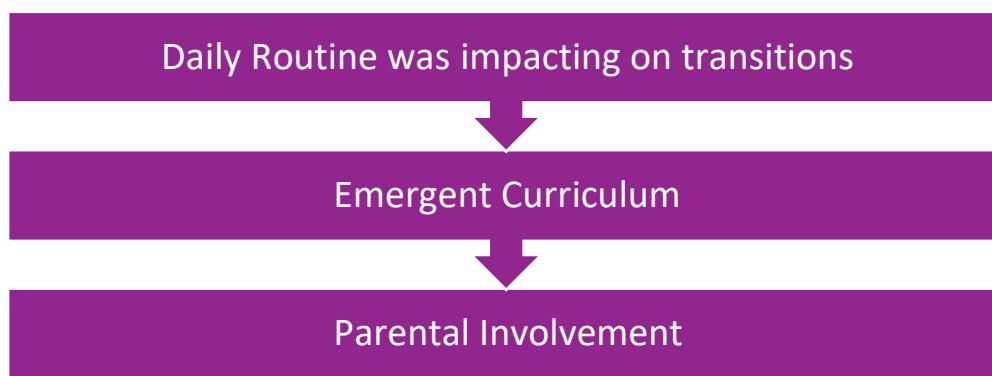
Figure 4.2 Emerging themes of baseline questionnaire

The triangulated findings from the questionnaires, anecdotal and time sample observations, reflective journal and conversations with my critical friends identified problems with the transition into the setting each morning. These problems were caused largely caused by the daily routine, the emergent curriculum, and the lack of parental involvement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From the baseline observations on children and from the data collected through the questionnaires and conversations with my critical friends MM and CD, I decided to carry out

further observations to specifically review the initial morning transition from home into the setting, for the period of one week (Appendix 12,13). I also issued parents with a questionnaire to gather their perspectives on my practices (Appendix15).

During times of transition, communication and interactions between the educators and parents was brief, partly due to social distancing, play pods and mask wearing. Today I observed myself saying to the parents, *"all good today, ate all his snack, see you tomorrow".* (Reflective Journal entry, 18th January 2022). While I acknowledge I was rushing the child's hand over to cover lunches breaks, I was also growing concerned by my lack of interaction with the parents. When I reflected on the handover, I was mortified, as it lacks any sort of information or detail about the child's day. O'Connor (2016) states that for most parents, the time when they will need to feel most connected with and supported by educators will be at the beginning and end of sessions. O'Connor (2016) states that the way parents and children are received at the start of the day will inevitably play a big part in reassuring the parent that their child is indeed cherished. When I reflected on my handover, I decided that I needed to ensure that I took appropriate steps to try and remove this barrier to improve my practices and live my values of care, inclusion and children's rights. From the data collected from the observations, I noted children voiced their opinions on wanting to play, while other children showed their emotions, such as crying, folding their arms in frustration, and sighing loudly. I also witnessed two boys, on separate occasions kicking the fence in frustration when they were asked to line up. While I observed some children handling these transitions in their stride, other children really struggled with lining up in the line and the adult initiated instruction that went with that.   Furthermore, I observed similar obstacles and behaviours at other times of transitions along the day. From the data, I noted that most interactions between the children and the educator were adult-initiated. Rules were enforced by the educator. Children voices were not heard and therefore this impeded their sense of independence, self-esteem and confidence.

After speaking with my critical friends MM and CD, I decided that my first intervention of action research cycle one would be to develop a community of practice (CoP) with the EYE participants.

Action Research Cycle One

My first intervention was to develop a community of practice (CoP) with the early years (EY) participants from zone D. I implemented this schedule of meetings with the EY participants, for a period of four weeks (Appendix 14). By using a timetable and a timeframe of 30 minutes per meeting. This supported my time management in ensuring that the goals I had set myself could be reached and to ensure that I used my time wisely (Rodd, 2013). Due to COVID-19 restrictions in place at that time and due to the size of the room where the meetings were being facilitated, I was only permitted to meet with a group of six early years educators from the same play pod. Wenger-Traynor (2015) states a community of practice (CoP) is not determined by size, it is the interactions and reciprocal communication and learning which determines the community validity.

I contacted all EYE participants from play pod (D), I invited them to voluntarily participate in the research and to be part of a CoP. I explained to them that, the focus of the CoP was to look at ways to enhance how transitions occur throughout the daily routine.

When all participants consented to participate in the research, dates, times and place, for the meetings were agreed amongst all participants. I set the agenda and sent it via email to the EY participants for our first meeting (Appendix16). I asked them if they had anything further to add, to forward it to me, before the meeting, so I could add it to the agenda. The series of ongoing meetings were held every Friday at 12.30 pm at the end of the ECCE session.

At the start of each meeting, I reminded the participants, that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any stage, if they so wished. All EY participants shared the same

common concerns about the daily routine and parental involvement. According to Wenger, (1998) communities of practice require a shared domain of interest, to which members are committed and in which they value each other's contributions and learn from each other. These meetings provided both the EYE participants and I with an opportunity to interact and to implement solutions to enhance the ways children transition into and around our setting. The ongoing meeting discussed how relationships between the educators and children can have an impact on the positive transitions. We then moved on to how we can support such relationships.

Participant KK suggested.

"Listening to the children, seeing what worries them, what excites them, what might influence them" (Participant, KK, 14th January 2022)

While JD suggested:

"Giving children time to talk and to reflect and to absorb information", (Participant JD, 14th January 2022).

While I acknowledge that the relationships between the children and the educators appeared to be strong and supportive, it made me consider why children were encountering such disruptive transitions. I spoke to the EYE participants about, how I felt the daily routine for transitioning into the setting in the morning was interfering with both relationship building and smooth transitions. Participants KK and LD spoke of their concerns about the daily routine and how children transition into the setting. I stated that this pre-school room was different from the other ECCE pre-school rooms within the setting, as it could not offer seamless provision. I stated that due to the design of the building and the situation of the classroom, that it was not feasible to offer seamless provision, as there was no direct access outdoors. Current practices require educators and children to walk 50 metres, through the garden and through numerous doors to gain access to their classroom.

All participants agreed that the initial morning transitions into the setting was the most difficult. Children arrive at 9.15am for their ECCE session, upon arrival, they must line up at the fence, and they must wait until all children are in attendance, before they transition indoors, due to the location of the classroom and due to the fact parents are not allowed into the setting.

Participant LD stated, that if a child is running late for the session, this causes extra pressure on the children and on the educator. It can become very stressful very quickly, as the children get frustrated and bored of waiting in the line. I agreed that this was not the most ideal solution, I suggested that we reflect and think about how we could enhance this transition for the children and educators.

JD stated:

"*That before COVID-19, transitions were obviously easer, children were dropped to their room, by their parents*". "*There was no waiting around, the children just used to run in*".

I suggested that we should talk to the parents and to explain to them, that the session starts at 9.15 am and if they are going to be late, to ring ahead. LD suggested that if not that they go straight to the office and the children would have to be brought down to the classroom by the manager. I agreed that this could be a solution if the issue persisted.

Participant CC stated that the transition in the morning suits her and her cohort of children as she has seamless provision in her room, as she feels the children are straight in the gate and straight into the classroom, she states, "*there is no messing and there are no parents hanging around chatting either*". CC also stated that she had no experience of what it was like pre-COVID as this is her first job in an early year setting and that she is a novice.

While I acknowledge that novice members often engage in marginal interaction with a CoP, as they observe the practices and culture of the setting from their more experienced colleagues (Wenger, 1998; Polizzi et al., 2021), I was concerned about how she felt about parental involvement and how she suggested that "parents hang around", I wondered if a lack

of interaction with colleagues and parents had perhaps been the reason for such a comment to be made. However, during the third week, I noticed that she had a different perspective as to why parents wanted to "hang around". I could see, how through the CoP she was starting to value the shared interest of improving practices and of relationships with other parents. Through the process of communication and interaction with colleagues, she could see the value each one of the EYE participants was placing on parental involvement. Participant TS stated that her biggest challenge was that the child with additional needs, was always trying to get in first and wanted to open all the doors and that he ends up pushing the other children out of his way and this causes conflict and upset amongst the other participants as they transition from outdoor to indoor and visa-versa I suggested that the children, pair up and hold hands and that would mean that the children with additional needs could either hold the educator hand or another child's hand. This would encourage children to learn collaboratively and to prevent them from running and pushing their way to the door when it is time to transition indoors. I also suggested contacting our Access and Inclusion mentor to discuss activities which would support the child's behaviour and communication, as interacting with other professionals, even when not face to face can support the learning and practice of a CoP (Wenger et n al., 2002).

All EYE participants stated that the daily routine was restricted due to adult led practices, Participant JD stated: "*that she feels that current practices are predominantly adult-led, and that she feels the children have become increasing frustrated with these practices*" (Participant JD, 14th January, 2022). Similarly, participant CC stated: "*Children have a lack of choice and the child's voice is limited within the routine*" (Participant CC, 14th January, 2022).

While I acknowledge what they said to be true, it was hard to hear. I had to consider why I was engaging in such practices given my knowledge and expertise in the field.

Notably, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12 states that children have the right to have their opinions heard and their views respected in decision-making in matters that affect them (UN, 1989).

Participants KK and CC stated:

 "That they felt that current practices were adult-led, therefore this limited the children experiences, the routine was too rigid, and most activities were pre-planned, meaning there was a lack of emergent thinking and lack of emergent play and that the children had numerous mini transitions throughout their morning. (Participants KK and CC, 14th January,2022).

After some careful consideration and a discussion with my critical friends MM and CD, I decided that I needed to alter and change my practices.

Altering my practice

The meetings began with a discussion on how we were going to enhance our morning time transitions and to collectively implement solutions to problems that we have identified within the daily routine.

I suggested that the first change would be to rearrange the children's outdoor play time. Originally it had been time tabled for 11.30am-12.15pm. I proposed that we change the time to 9.15am to 10.00am. As I had not observed any other play pod making use of the space during that particular time frame. All participants agreed that they felt that this would ease the children initial transition into the setting in the morning. It would also support children to transition easier by providing them with a "transition space". It would also offer the children more continuity as they would learn that when they arrive, they are going straight to play, there would be no sudden transitions indoors first thing in the morning and it would reduce the number of unnecessary transitions, which would have previously been implemented. It also offered the children the opportunity to have their voices heard and to offer them the

choice to make decisions in relation to their own learning (CECDE, 2006). While also providing the children with more of a playful start to their day, I suggested that the new garden time would allow for extra time to converse in informal conversation with parents and to building on relationships. Participants agreed that it should start as soon as possible. I agreed as I said, current practices are not working and are causing children unnecessary anxiety. I suggested that from Monday morning, that we implement the garden time at the earlier time and that we could start from there and look at ways of further reducing transition and mini transitions as they day unfolds. I stated that we could observe how those two new transitions goes and then plan from there. JD suggested that instead of me asking the children to line up when it's time to transition outdoor, she suggested that I use a whistle, she stated that from a previous setting she worked in, she experienced an educator using a whistle when the children were outdoors. She suggested you whistle once to warn the children that it is getting close to transition time and then you blow it five times when it is time to line up. She stated that the children soon got used to the whistle being blown and by the time the fifth whistle was blown that they would be in a line. I suggested that we also try that and to see how the children adjust to the new transitions.

Evaluation of Cycle One

I started the meeting by reflecting on how I felt the new daily routine was impacting on the children. The participants stated that the children were more engaged throughout the day in activities. One parent stated that her child came home today bursting with excitement to tell me her news, she told me all about playing outside and that she even got to have circle-time outdoors, the parent stated that it was the first time that her child came home telling her news, and she was just thrilled to hear she was happy (Reflective Journal, 2022). The EY participants jointly agreed that the children were happier and excited to come in, but even more excited to be able to run off and play together outdoors. LD spoke about how she has

noted a significant change in all children, and particular for child (G), he is less disruptive, he

enjoys transitioning indoor now as he has had his playtime. LD also stated that today was the

first time this year that child B, handed me Freddie (the child's transitional object) to mind.

This change has supported the children to have a smoother transition into their day. It has also

meant that there is no lining up, no sudden transfer indoors and the start to their day is more

playful. It has also offered me the opportunity to let the curriculum be more child-led, by

listening to what the children want and especially at times of transition. I asked KK, how she

was finding the planning of the activities now and how the new routine was suiting her, she

stated that it gives the children more choice, they are happier. I asked her how the child (child

E) with additional needs was adjusting to such a significant change in his routine, she stated

that he has adjusted well to the new routine, she also stated that she has introduced Visual

sand timers within the room for times of transition, to let the children know that we will be

transitioning soon, and it appears to be working. This also means that my voice is not always

telling them that they must transition from one activity to another. From previous discussions

and observations, I knew the participant was knowledgeable and proficient in her practices,

she was able to recognise and offer the team the opportunity to share her professional

discourse on how observed practices from a previous experience in another setting, can

inform on the effectiveness of the setting. In recognising these strengths and areas for

development and through analysis, this demonstrates a realistic understanding of how to

further develop my existing practices (Ofsted, 2014a).

Action Research Cycle Two

I acknowledge that while traditionality in the Kemmis and McTaggart model of action

research, one cycle follows on from the previous cycle. McTaggart, Sullivan et al, (2016)

states that Action Research is messy and unpredictable. This was the certainly the case for

this research project as cycle two overlapped with cycle one. Towards the end of the first

intervention, the discussions of the community of practice started to focus on the role of the

emergent curriculum in transitions. Through identifying the emerging themes relating to my

first action research cycle and as I came towards the end of the first intervention the

discussions of the community of practice started to focus on the role of the emergent

curriculum and how transitions were leading to ways, we could improve our approaches to

the emergent curriculum. From the data, the EY participants indicated that a larger group

discussion would enhance practices and the co-construction of knowledge. I decided to meet

with my critical friends MM and CD, to discuss how I could introduce the AISTEARSIOLTA

toolkit to reflect and improve on approaches to emergent curriculum.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions relating to play pods, group meetings had to be kept

small and only a certain amount of adult's were permitted to be in an enclosed space within the

setting, therefore I had to find a space where the team could meet collectively but still feel safe

while adhering to Covid-19 policies and procedures. KK suggested that the reception area of

the setting would be an ideal location for a team meeting. This would allow for up to six

participants to discuss and reflect upon how we can improve our own practices.

Action Research Cycle Two

We began to discuss the emergent curriculum. EY participants spoke about how they felt that

the current practices were nearly all adult initiated. Children were transitioning from one

adult-led activity to the next. While some of the children handled the transitions, others were

disruptive and frustrated at having to tidy up something that they were playing with to do

another adult-led activity. Participants KK and CC jointly stated that at the start of the year

the children had more choice in the curriculum, they always got to choose what they wanted

to play with. Where now, the children are going from one adult-led activity to the next and

they have no choice, their needs were not being met and their interests were not being considered. LD stated that the since the most recent winter wave of COVID 19, that educators were more cautious when it came to emergent play. Children were giving table-top activities or art and crafts instead of free-play. KK stated that she felt that it was easier for the adults to initiate activities, as then they would know what they had to clean after the session. JD stated that she felt that the recent practices were not very responsive to the children needs and that there were too many mini transitions for children each day within the setting. I stated that from my initial baseline observations on the children, that I had observed children, transitioning 12 different times within a three-hour period. While some of these mini transitions were care routines, for snack and toileting, other transitions were avoidable.

The children were giving little or no choice and they were made participate in activities even though they caused serious disruption, an example of this was at circle time, I witnessed a child sitting on the floor for the whole of circle banging on his chair and making noises. Children had previously voiced their opinions on circle time, yet every day it was carried out. The daily routine had become rigid and there was no flexibility to it. Practices were predominantly adult initiated instead of a shared control with the children. When questions arose in relating to the mini transitions, the participants appeared comfortable in sharing their knowledge and experiences in how to reduce them. By meeting collectively as a CoP, it supported the team in not only adopting new educational practices (Wenger et al., 2002), many participants became vocal when discussing improving transitions and mini transitions. They shared their knowledge and ideas in promoting children's learning and development. It also appeared that many of the participants were enthused with the suggestion of each educator trying to reduce two transitions a day within their environment and to use their expertise to create and modify a transition space for the children

<u>Altering my Practices</u>

By taking on board the data I received from the educators during the team meeting in relation to my own practices, I felt that this had supported the EY participants in becoming more assertive in contributing to the team by altering my practices. Previously when I engaged in CoP, I would hinder the opportunity of mutual engagement by asking and answering the questions. I had to remind myself that I was no longer a leader who was overseeing everyone's practices and instead I needed to challenge and change my own practices. This change in mindset would empower the participants to participate and support my values of collaboration (Piercey, 2010). The meetings began with a discussion on how we can plan to develop a more emergent approach to curriculum that follows the child's interests. I started by asking the EY participants if they would like to improve practices and reduce the number of transitions that children participate in. I suggested that we use the AISTEARSIOLTA toolkit. Four out of the Six participants stated that they had heard of the toolkit but had never used it. I stated that its purpose was to critically reflect on our curriculum and to identity what works well and what does not. Additionally, the resources can help EY educators to help identify priorities for development and to plan for positive

outcomes. I handed each EY participant a copy of the Action Planning template and we read through the document together. I suggested that for the next meeting that we use the template to outline the changes or plans that we hoped to make or are making. The EY participants stated that listening to the children, especially when they are questioning and having conversations about their play was important. CC stated that she wanted the daily routine to be more free-flowing and that from the time the children come in from the garden at 10am, that the children then would get their snack and after snack they could have free emergent play for the rest of the session. CC suggested that this would eliminate multiple transitions while also providing the children with ways of identifying their interest and inquiry into play within the preschool room. The sharing and co-construction of knowledge became more

apparent as the meetings continued. It appeared that EYE participants were more comfortable in sharing and discussing their experience and knowledge with colleagues who had a shared interest. EY participants also stated that when they critically reflected with the action planning toolkit that it allowed them to look at the meaning of curriculum. It also helped them to share with others. I stated that this activity would help us to think about our current curriculum and ways to enhance it. Before working on the practice guide. By meeting collectively as a CoP, it supported the team in not only adopting new educational practices (Wenger et al., 2002).

I then introduced the EY participants to the self-evaluation tools for transitions, as this document is larger, there is significantly more critical reflection to be completed. I suggested that all EY participants take sections at a time, as not to overwhelm them on their first introduction to this document.

Many participants also became more vocal when discussing improving a more play based emergent curriculum. They shared their knowledge and ideas in promoting children's learning and development. Iaquinto et al., (2011), suggest effective CoP's concentrate on utilising the community's agency and strengths. I felt that some members had moved from the peripheral to the active group (Vincent et al., 2018). By meeting collectively as a CoP, it supported the team in not only adapting new educational practices (Wenger et al. 2002). This was evident when discussing altering our practices in supporting reducing the transitions within the pre-school room. Many participants shared their knowledge and ideas in promoting children's learning and development. In ensuring that transitions are as smooth as possible for children and their parents, children themselves and the relevant professionals should be consulted and involved in the process (CECDE, 2006:87).

Participant KK suggested speaking with the children first about changing the curriculum. LD agreed and stated that the children should be given the opportunity to share what they would like to do and to let that be the starting point to enhancing our practices. When I posed a

question to the children: "What do you like to play in pre-school?" From the conversations

with children, they stated that: "*playing with their friends, playing outdoors, playing*

superheroes, story time and drawing on my own, were their favourite activities.

 Aistear states that good adult/child interactions are respectful, playful, enjoyable, enabling

and rewarding (NCCA, 2009:27). By using language that was appropriate for their age and

ability, I spoke with the children, and I explained to them that we were planning on changing

the daily routine. This conversation helped me to consider changing my practices from an

adult-led to a more emergent play-based curriculum. The EY participants suggested removing

the daily routine totally and just to let the day be free flowing. I stated that this could be

questioned if I had an inspection. I stated that once I was able to prove that the children were

having an emergent play based curriculum that I could underpin my practices through Siolta

and Aistear, then I could possibly consider removing it.

Evaluation of Cycle 2

By using the AISTEARSIOLTA Toolkit, EY participants were able to identify what was

happening in practice, such as multiple transitions within a three-hour time frame. They were

able to plan changes and document the changes they made and the impact these changes were

having. Participant JD stated that initially changing the curriculum was daunting. The

children were in everything, the room was upside down the first day. However, as the week

went on, the children were more engaged in the activities, they played for longer, they

discovered things and were more content. CC and LD used visual timers to indicate when a

transition was going to happen, and so far, it appears to be working. KK stated that the child

with additional needs is adjusting, it is taking him longer than we had initially anticipated, but

that we are getting there. TS stated that the children are sharing their expertise and co-

constructing their knowledge. KK stated, the children invented a news channel. The children

decided two weeks ago to design a television out of a cardboard box and now if anyone has

news, they place the box over their head and walk around the room, telling people their news. The challenges are that I am adjusting, the noise is something that I had overlooked but the children seem so happy. I decided that for me to make mini-transitions smoother within the setting, that I needed to provide the children with my ongoing support, so I decided instead of telling them what to do that I would get stuck in with them during their free play. I started to communicate and to interact more with them. Over the weeks, I was starting to build an attachment with them as our play episodes progressed.

In my previous practices, the EYE participants told me that I did not engage in play with the children. KK stated: Do not take this the wrong way, but you always stand giving everyone else the orders". I had never thought of my practices like that before. I decided that I would be more hands on with the children, by the fourth week I could see a significant difference in how my practices were engaging the children, the children were happy, I noticed lots of new language and the children and I planned and created and when I reflected on it, Play and work was more fun. I started to enjoy being with the children again. I started to see my values and purpose again. What I now realise is that mini transitions are smoother, the children's language has improved, they are always planning and organising their play. By reducing the mini-transitions, I observed the children to be more confident and vocal; they were able to make connection between the home and pre-school. They were also starting to engage more critically in their play, they were reasoning more and sharing with each other. The EYE Participants also noted that while children are less disturbed by the transitions now there are still numerous transitions during the session, but these were more child-led transitions than adult initiated ones. I suggested that the children were happier as they were immersed in the play and the planning around play. The children were given a voice in their play episodes and the educators role was to nurture this. I observed one play episode that supported such an inquiry-based emergent curriculum. Following on from a story (Maisy goes to a wedding), which was read to the children last week. Child 4 and Child 1 stated that they would like to get married in pre-

school. The new emergent inquiry-based approach allowed educators and children to progress

their inquiry over the following days. The children spoke in detail about what they would wear,

the music, the flowers and when the wedding was going to be, they agreed a

Friday was the best day, as on a Friday the chef in the setting, gives them buns as a snack.

The emergent curriculum was responsive, and the educators build on the children's interests

and experiences as starting points for curriculum planning. This is evident in the pictures

below.

Figures: 4.3 and 4.4 Photographs of the emerging curriculum "Wedding"

This learning emerged after child (1) came into the setting last week holding a book called "Maisy gets

Married". Child (1) had just been on holidays in the United Kingdom, where she was a flower girl at her

parents wedding. Upon arrival to the setting, the little girl was visibly upset and snuggling into her mum. I

noticed that she was carrying a book, I asked her if I could see the book, she shrugged her shoulders and

then showed me the cover. I asked her if she would like to sit on the bench with your mammy and we

could all read the story together. She agreed. We all sat and read the story on the bench in the garden. By the time the story had ended, the child was visibly more comfortable and then said goodbye to her mummy. This eased the transition from the home environment to the pre-school.

Later that morning, when it came to story time, child (1) suggested that we read her story. Once the story was finished, I asked her some questions about the wedding. Child (1) told all her friends all about her mummy and daddy's wedding. The following week, as I was carrying out my observations, I overheard a conversation between the children in the room.
"*Why don't we get married*", stated child (3), "*yes, let's ask all our friends to come*", child (5), "I will wear a dress", (3) and "*we can have flowers*" (7). We will get married like Child (1)'s mammy and daddy. I experienced the children planning the wedding and my role was to facilitate this emerging interest. At circle time, we all sat down and planned the Wedding, "child (1) *suggested that Friday was a good day, as on a Friday, they get cupcakes for snack, so we will have cake"*.

 As the educator, I helped them to plan what they needed and we organized a wedding for that Friday. I noted that by using the emergent curriculum approach the children experienced all these activities without having to negotiate jarring or adult-led transitions. This is an example of how by using an emergent curriculum and by using the AISTEARSIOLTA practice guide that individuals or teams can plan and guide their practices by using ongoing review and development. The EYE participants and I collectively agreed that by using the AISTEARSIOLTA Toolkit that it made us all critically reflect on our practices. I felt that the templates helped me to improve the quality of my practices within the early years setting. From the time samples observations, I noted that some days the children would still have multiple transitions, but through the emergent curriculum practices that they had significantly reduced. I noted in my reflective journal how I observed the children transitioning from one-activity to another flawlessly, there was no tears, no outbursts of anxiety or emotion, the children appeared to be content. From observation (6) I

observed child (5) stating "*that pre-school is so much fun now*". From an extract in my reflective journal, 11th of February 2022, *"wow, you guys are having so much fun these days".* Child (3) parents stated: *"my child is coming home and telling me all about his adventures each day, he is just loving school, what has changed?".* This specific journal entry reassured me that I am on the right track and that the mini transitions within the pre-school are smoother and more enjoyable for the children.

The toolkit also offered me ways to make my learning visible. As a graduate from the Degree programme in Maynooth, I have a skill set that can enhance children's learning outcomes and that I wanted to share my learning and practices with my colleagues. By engaging in the CoP, I was able to achieve this. Furthermore, by making my learning more visible to my fellow colleagues, parents and children, I was able to enhance my practices within the setting. The participants stated that by using the toolkit that they engaged in group discussion and that all our practices had become more collegial. I agreed. I also stated that being part of a CoP within my setting was nice as I had not engaged in a CoP in my setting previously. I stated that when I was the manager, we had team meetings, but we never had the opportunity to engage in a CoP on a related topic and that this was a positive experience for me. All participants stated that the transitions practices within the daily routine have been significantly reduced and that the routine during the day is much calmer, and the children are more at ease. All participants agreed that the child's voice was now at the heart of their practices and KK stated: "*that practice had been wonderful in recent weeks".*

Conclusion

This chapter discussed in detail, the findings and results of the data gathered through the baseline questionnaires, reflections, interviews, team meetings and conversations with the children and with conversation with my critical friends. The data supported me in identifying

themes and areas of my practice, which would support me in living my values and answer the question, *"How can I support positive transitions in my preschool setting?"*.

For transitions to be successfully implemented in pre-schools, there must be mutual respect and trust. The voice of all children must be heard through practice. Furthermore, a safe place must be provided where children will feel comfortable in sharing their views, opinions and ideas as well as providing them with choice through the emergent curriculum. One must also be aware of the power dynamics between the educator and the child. Given time this will emerge and positive relationships between the educator and the child will emerge. Over time this power dynamic should lesson therefore enabling the child/children to feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas with the educator and the educator equally feeling comfortable and ready to genuinely hear what their students have to say.

While I am still in the process of cultivating a CoP with my fellow colleagues to further support my practices, engaging in this research has informed and enhanced my practice and reaffirmed my values. In chapter five, I will discuss my findings, recommendations for future practice and the significance of my research journey.

Chapter Five

Introduction

In this chapter I will conclude this thesis by discussing my conclusions and recommendations which have emerged since researching the topic of "*How can I support positive transitions in my early years setting*". My journey began by exploring new strategies that would help enhance my practices as an early childhood educator. While I feel that this was accomplished, embarking upon this journey has amplified my understanding of why I needed to change my practices and how best to enhance how children transition within my early years setting. As this research evolved it not only developing relationships with parents, but it also helped me to engage with my colleagues and we developed a community of practice. It also made me reflect on how transitions within the daily routine are now being led by children's interests, while also listening to how they communicate their needs within the early years setting.

Cultivating a community of practice

Leadership in early years involves inspiring others with a vision, a capacity for reflection and dedication to provide the best quality care and education. Morgan (1997) describes leadership as being muti-faceted involving reciprocal relationships highlighting the ability to promote collaboration and teamwork. However, the challenges of leadership are diverse, throughout this research I found myself stepping back into the managers role. I found myself trying to lead practices and I was constantly trying to lead the team forward and to motivate them. Rodd (2006:12) outlines the complexity of the role of a leader highlighting that they need the ability to "balance concern for work, task, quality and productivity with concern for people, relationships, satisfaction and morale".

I found that now as an early year's educator that I needed to be able to develop collaborative ways of working with others and to build a culture where change is seen as exciting and

motivating. Through collaborating on a more equal footing with my colleagues through a CoP this allowed me to draw on their expertise as well as sharing my own.

It supports Wenger (1998) theory, that learning communities or communities of practice, are groups who share a common concern and who are willing to learn how to do it better. They interact regularly to share information resources and to learn together to improve their practices. This has also helped me to live more closely to my values and to improvement to my practice.

It also supports Brookfield's (1995) theory on how teaching can be an extremely moral and ethical understanding and how we must examine all kinds of assumptions about teaching, learning and about the educational values that we hold. This would support all of us in the team in recognising their vison and focus, while taking ownerships of practice (Wenger et al, 2002). I feel that this is particularly important as our profession remains without a processional identity (Moloney, 2015) I believe that this played a part in my role as an educator in my own practice, as I was attempting to navigate my old manager role while living in contradiction to my values (Whitehead, 1989).

Right-Based Approach

Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and Siolta (2006) both draw on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), They both highlight the importance of children being involved in decisions that affect them and having their opinions and choices respected. The principles of Aistear and Siolta place children at the centre of their own learning and development. When analysing the data, I realised that while the children were respected and valued, they were far from the centre of my practices. My practices were predominately adult-led and adult initiated. Routines were rigid and numerous transitions were encountered as

children transitioned from one adult led activity to the next. Therefore, I had to change my practices.

I have now established that through positive transitions, relationships between the educator and the children are more responsive. Children are now learning to think, understand, communicate, behave and express emotion in different ways. As I adopted these new practices I could see the benefits of supporting the child/children. Through participation with the children, we plan together now and I am consciously considering the children's needs and wants to and how we plan our activities. By making time for conversations and making time listen to the children's voice, practices have changed dramatically.

The research findings suggest that by adopting a pedagogy of voice and a pedagogy of listening, children transition between activities and environments smoothly. From observing the children's comments and conversations, children were voicing their opinions, thoughts on what they wanted to participate in within the early years' environment, where before children's voices were silenced. I have learnt that their opinions matter. Their voices really do matter, and the UNCRC (1989) was a hallmark in establishing the need for the voice of the child to be heard at times of transitions, especially in matters which affect them (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009).

To answer my research question, how can I support transitions for children in my early years setting, I have learnt that listening to the children is the most important thing at times of transition. By adopting a rights-based approach, identifying and responding to the multiple ways in which children communicate and express their voices.

The child as an active agent in their learning

When it comes to learning, agency is an important feature to maximise the learning experience of the child (Charteris, 2016; Charteris & Thomas, 2017). "Agency is the student's capacity to take up learning opportunities in the environment: engaging the disposition to

learn" (Charteris, 2013:20). When children recognise their voice is being heard, their ideas

and opinions valued and sharing their thoughts count towards the decision-making process, a

sense of children's agency, active involvement and cooperative learning develops. The

following photo and conversation with child A and Child C, represent how they felt their

voice were being heard when we changed and enhanced our practices through the

engagement of a community of practice within the staffing team, we decided to change and

enhance our practices, so we reverted the daily routine back to a more emergent play-based

curriculum. We gave the children the freedom to investigate their ideas and interest through

many experiences, conversations and this is what happened, see figure 5. I learnt that I could

leverage children's agency through the emergent curriculum instead of imposing adult

controlled routines.

Collaboration with Parents

By collaborating with parents, it encourages parents to stay actively involved in all processes

of their child's/children development. This is supported and acknowledge by me as their early

years educator and researcher. By collaborating with the children and their parents, this is an

excellent opportunity not only to build early relationships but also to have effective

transitions. This supports Brookers (2005) theory on the importance of respectful two-sided

dialogue, this helps me to understand children's perspectives and structure the daily routine

accordingly.

Personal learning journey

By participating in this self-reflection action research project, I learned a lot about myself and

my evolving identity as an early years' educator and as a potential leader. At the beginning of

the study, I identified five values, care, relationships, children's voice. children's rights and

inclusion. After becoming more aware of myself and what I valued in my early years setting,

I recognised that I found it hard to let go of my management role. I identified how I felt I

needed to fix and control the learning environment instead of focusing on being a good

facilitator for learning (in line with my values). To vanquish this and to maintain reasonable

research practice throughout the study, I adhered to the Maynooth Handbook Code of Ethics

guidelines (Wrynn, 2021) in which I learnt that researching my practice within my learning

community meant that I had a responsibility towards the participants. I needed to protect the

rights of the other participants in my research and to ensure accuracy (Sullivan et al,

2016:94). This work has actually transformed my thinking and that even though my

dissertation has ended that I will be engaging in further cycles, stemming from this for

example my next task is transforming the transition space where children enter into the

setting.

Recommendations

Through engaging in this research, I now recognise aspects of it which could be enhanced upon.

When cultivating a community of practice, I would recommend that the EY participants are

given time to carefully plan for transitions within their daily routine and their practices. I also

recommend that EYE participants and parents come together and get involved in drafting up

transitions policies that incorporates vertical, horizontal transitions and mini transitions.

This would allow participants to have a greater sense of identity and belonging within the

community of practice, while also provoking interest in becoming a member (Wenger, 1998).

I would also recommend the use of the AistearSiolta Toolkit for individuals and groups as it

supports educators in using Aistear: *The Early Childhood*

Curriculum Framework (2009a) and Siolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2006) together to develop the quality of their curriculum and in doing so, to better support children's learning and development.

The toolkit helped me and the participants of this study to evaluate my practices, to reflect on them and to change them to support more fluid transitions for children within the pre-school room. By giving children more of a shared control over their actions, though play, ideas, conversation and how they transition. This gives the children more agency. A requirement for children's agency is that children must be active participants in their own learning. Active participation is to actively engage students as "producers of knowledge" such as students -as-co-researchers" (Fielding, 2001; Ruddock & Fielding, 2006) with a goal being to increase student's representation and participation (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). By including the children voice in matters that affect them, this meant I could get an insight into the children's thoughts.

The specific changes were that children had more agency, they were able to predict and cope with the change by providing reliable and stable relationships, continuity of care and a secure base. It also made transitions more seamless, smooth and organised not rushed or unpleasant.

My claim to Knowledge

This self-study action research journey has supported me in reaffirming my values of having a collegial environment and socially constructing knowledge with my colleagues that supports children and the parents. I became aware of this when I amended my practice and I truly understood my role as an educator, as a key worker as a secondary attachment figure to the children in my care.

The unexpected data which was provided from my data collection in observations and the team meeting was that while I valued and respected the children, I was obstructing the children interests and voices by controlling the daily practices by having all adult led practices.

Furthermore, I discovered that this was impacting not only on the children but also on me as

an educator. Transitions were not only challenging, for the children, they were equally

stressful for me as the educator, as the children were unwilling to participate in such adult-led

practices. Since I have changed my practices, the children are happier, transitions are

smoother, and I am listening and responding to the children to support their interests rather

than choosing for them.

Limitations to my Research

A limitation of this research was that the COVID 19 pandemic was still evident in practice.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 on practices, I had to alter and change the number of

participants that could be actively involved in this research. I was only permitted to work

with one play pod, and this meant that my researcher had to be carried out on a smaller scale

than I had originally hoped for.

Another limitation of this research was undertaking this study while also trying to raise a

small family I found it extremely demanding as I was a student, a researcher, and a mammy.

Ensuring that I found a balance between researching the topic, implementing actions, and

reflecting on the process as well as fulfilling my mammy duties was a challenge

Additionally, acting as a student and researcher was difficult and posed some limitations as

there was always the risk that I would automatically step back into my mangers mind frame

and role and to advise participants on what to do and how to do it, instead of working through

their ideas as a team and as a student. However, the topic and action research project were

deeply personal to me, so if it were to be replicated in a similar context, it may not offer

identical findings or results, (McDonagh et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the learning theory which

emerged from this study may be applicable to the practice of other educators. These findings

are not generalisable if this study was to be replicated.

Disseminating my Research

As highlighted throughout this study, the concept of transitions in the early years is constantly developing and evolving where educational stakeholders are beginning to realise the importance and value of transitions in the early years (Fabian and Dunlop, 2007 and O'Connor 2016: O'Kane 2008). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the findings of this study are beneficial for early years educators, supervisors, managers and educational influences in the wider ECEC community through conferences and webinars and to create change, the findings of this study must be shared. The main findings of this study will be presented to the early year's educators in my setting on return to pre-school in September 2022 with the hope that by sharing this study, my colleagues will see the immense benefit to enhancing transitions for children in a preschool room and to become more informed about the effective methodologies when implementing transitions practices in the setting.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings and recommendations of this research. It also discussed my claim to knowledge, the limitations of this study and my plans of sharing my research. It highlighted the impact this research had not only on my values and practice, but as my identity as a ECEC educator. While I am still adapting to my new role as educator, I still have my managers cap on, I will continue to support my attempt of cultivating a community of practice through critically and meta-reflecting on my practice, as engaging in such practice profoundly supported my learning and supported me in living closer to my values.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1- Letter to the Board of Management:

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Frobel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Dear Directors,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree, I am doing a research project based on *"How can I support positive transitions in my early years setting"* and whether this leads to more continuity of experiences for children and their parents as they transition into and around the early years setting.

In order for me to carry out this research, I am writing to you to seek your permission for me to carry out my research in your early years setting. I plan on gathering data over the next few months (January 2022-May 2022), I am aware of the current pod system in place due to the Covid Guidelines, within your setting. So, I would be grateful if you could assign me to one of your ECCE pre-school room for the duration of my research.

As part of my research, I must gain permission from each participant, so that would involve me getting permission from the managers, educators, parents and children and critical friends. I plan on conversing with them about my research informally and if they approve, I will formally invite them to sign permission forms stating they agree to take part in my research. Each participant will also in informed of the opt in/ opt out cause if they wish to withdraw at any stage during the stated time period.

The methods I plan on using to collect data are, observations, interviews, questionnaires samples of the child's work, a reflective journal, team meetings and photography. Each participant including children will be anonymous and their names and the name of the Early Years setting will not in included in my thesis. All information will be confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University Guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

I would like to invite you to give your permission for me to take part in this research project within your early years setting. If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me by email at ingrid.burrell.2017@mumail.ie or earlyyearsmasters@gmail.com.

Yours faithfully,

Ingrid Burrell

Ingrid Burrell   16728181

Roinn Frobel Don Bhunagus Luath-Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Dear Management,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree, I am doing a research project based on *"How can support positive transitions in my early year setting"*, and whether this leads to more continuity of experiences for children and their parents as they transition into and around the early years setting.

In order for me to carry out this research, I am writing to you to seek your permission for me to carry out my research in your early years setting. I plan on gathering data over the next few months (January 2022-May 2022), I am aware of the current pod system in place due to the Covid Guidelines, within your setting. So, I would be grateful if you could assign me to one of your ECCE pre-school room for the duration of my research.

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The methods I plan on using to collect data are, observations, interviews, questionnaires samples of the child's work, a reflective journal, team meetings and photography. Each participant including children will be anonymous and their names and the name of the Early Years setting will not in included in my thesis. All information will be confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University Guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

I would like to invite you to give your permission for me to take part in this research project within your early years setting. If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me by email at ingrid.burrell.2017@mumail.ie or earlyyearsmasters@gmail.com.

Yours faithfully,

Ingrid Burrell

Appendix 3-Letter to Early Years Educators

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath-Oideachas,
                              Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Dear Educators,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree, I am doing a research project based on *"How can I support positive transitions in my early years setting"* and whether this leads to more continuity of experiences for children and their parents as they transition into and around the early years setting.

In order for me to carry out this research, I am writing to you to seek your permission for me to carry out my research in your early years setting. I plan on gathering data over the next few months (January 2022-May 2022), I am aware of the current pod system in place due to the Covid Guidelines, within your setting. So, I would be grateful if you could assign me to one of your ECCE pre-school room for the duration of my research.

As part of my research, I must gain permission from each participant, so that would involve me getting permission from the managers, educators, parents and children and critical friends. I plan on conversing with them about my research informally and if they approve, I will formally invite them to sign permission forms stating they agree to take part in my research. Each participant will also in informed of the opt in/ opt out cause if they wish to withdraw at any stage during the stated time period.

The methods I plan on using to collect data are, observations, interviews, questionnaires samples of the child's work, a reflective journal, team meetings and photography. Each participant including children will be anonymous and their names and the name of the Early Years setting will not in included in my thesis. All information will be confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University Guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

I would like to invite you to give your permission for me to take part in this research project within your early years setting. If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me by email at ingrid.burrell.2017@mumail.ie or earlyyearsmasters@gmail.com.

Yours faithfully,

Ingrid Burrell

Appendix 4- Letter to Parents

Ingrid Burrell   16728181

Roinn   Frobel   Don   Bhun-agus   Luath-
Oideachas,Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

**Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Master of
Education (Research in practice) (MEd)**

Dear Parents,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my
degree, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on "How can I
support positive transitions in my early years setting? and whether this leads to more
continuity of experiences for children and their parents as then transition into and around the
early years setting and how these key relationships impact on the child's holistic well-being.

        In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom over the coming
months (January- May) using Qualitative data. The data will be collected using observations,
interviews, samples of the child's work, a reflective journal, team meetings and photography
of their samples of work. The children will be asked their opinions through discussing how
transitions impact on them. The child's name and the name of the pre-school setting will not
be included in the thesis, and what I will write at the end of the research journey. Your child
will be allowed to withdraw from the research process at any stage.

        All information will be confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated
timeframe in accordance with the University Guidelines. The correct guidelines will be
complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried
out until approval is granted by the Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood
Education.

        I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her to take part in
this project. If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact
me by email at ingrid.burrell.2017@mumail.ie or earlyyearsmasters@gmail.com.

Yours faithfully,

_____

Ingrid Burrell

Appendix 5-Information Sheet for Participants

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
Early Childhood Education

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Master of Education (Research in practice) (MEd)

Information sheet for Participants

What is this action Research Project About?

Teachers undertaking the Masters of Education in the Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University, are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a student teacher. This project will involve an analysis of the teacher's own practices. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes, questionnaires, photography, children's work, interviews. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

What are the research Questions?

"How can I support the role of relationships through transitions in an early-years setting?".

"How can I support the role of transitions between the child, educator and parents?"

"How have relationships with parents changed since the pandemic and what can I learn from this?"

"How can I support the children to transition within the early years environment?"

"How can I support he children's and parents to make smooth transitions within the early years setting?

"How can I learn from research about relationships, their responsibilities and roles during the transitions period?"

What sorts of method will be used?

Observations, event samples and anecdotal, interviews, photography of the children's art work/ drawings, reflective notes, team meetings.

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by myself as part of the Masters of Education course in the Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module leader Dr. Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

What are you being asked to do? You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with an early year's class. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the upmost confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. Th data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Masters of Education in the Frobel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with university guidelines.

Contact Details: Ingrid.burrell.2017@mumail.ie or earlyyearsmasters@gmail.com.

Appendix 6-Board of Management/Manager/Educators Consent Forms

Maynooth University
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
Early Childhood Education

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Master of Education (Research in practice) (MEd)

Board of Management/ Manager/Educators consent form

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to the participate in this action research project. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 7- Parents/Guardians Consent Forms

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
                              Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
                              Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
                              Early Childhood Education

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Master of Education (Research in practice) (MEd)

Parents/Guardians consent form

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in the study. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of the Child: _____

Child's Signature: _____

        Date: _____

Appendix 8- Children's Consent Forms

Roinn   Frobel   Don   Bhun-agus   Luath-
Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Frobel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

**Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Master of
Education (Research in practice) (MEd)**

Child's Name: _____

I am trying to find out "How I support positive transitions in my early year setting".

I would like to find out more about this. I would like to watch you and listen to you when you
are in pre-school and to write down some notes about you and how you form relationships
during times of transition.

Would you be ok with that?

Please Circle One: YES   or   NO

I have asked your Parents/ Guardians to discuss this with you. If you have any questions, I
would be happy to answer them. If you are happy with that, could you please sign this form.

Child's Signature: _____

Parents Signature: _____

If you change your mind after we start, that's ok too ☺

Appendix 9- Child Assent to participate

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath-Oideachas Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Master of Education (Research in practice) (MEd)
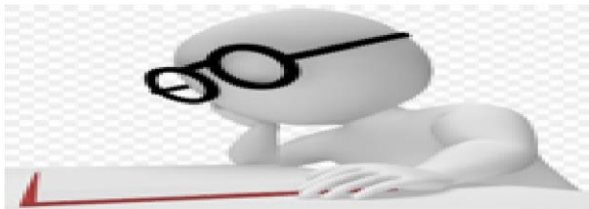
Child's Assent to participate

My parent/guardian has read the information sheet with me, and I agree to take part in this research.

Child's Name: _____

Child's Mark Making: _____

Name of the child in Block Capitals): _____

Parents Signature: _____

Appendix 10-Action Plan

Time Frame	Plan	Aim
September-December	Identify & Articulate values for research topic Prepare Ethics Statement for University & Directors of Early Years Setting Reflect on my own practice Seek participants	Preparing for Research Project
January	Questionnaires Anecdotal and event sample observations. Reflective Journal Critical friends Conversations with children/parents	Gather Baseline Data for my practice Implement Interventions for cycle 1
February	Observations Team Meetings Cycle 2 overlapped with cycle one. Final meeting from cycle 1 was the start of cycle 2.	To provide opportunities for communication with children/ educators. Team Conversations with children/parents meeting every Friday
March	Team Meetings with Educators Discuss with Critical friends.	Discuss intervention 1 & 2 and gather data. Discuss data with Critical friends
April	Speak with critical friends.	Thematic Analysis

May	*Begin to Analysis Data and start write up.	Examine if I am enhancing my practice & is this reflected in my values.
June	Supervisor meetings to Discuss Data and write. up	• Start write up

Appendix 11- Baseline Questionnaire

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath-Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Baseline Questionnaire Question

1:

Are transitions important in your practice?

Question 2:

Are children's voices heard during times of transition, if so, explain further or if not, explain why?

Question 3:

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about in the daily routine, that you would like to improve?

Question 4:

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about how the child/children's development and how it may or may not be impacted on or by the transitions that they encounter?

Question 5:

Is there anything in the daily routine that doesn't support you as the educator to support and adapt to the needs of each individual child?

Question 6:

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about, perhaps about how often you reflect and observe transitions that you have encountered and how you document such changes?

Question 7:

Is there anything else you would like to improve to support the children and parents to transition into the setting?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Appendix 12- Learner Record Template

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath-Ollscoil

Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Aistear
Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

Learning Record Template

early childhood ireland

NCCA
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

1 **Look at what I'm doing** Include a short description and one or two photos of me as I learn and develop.	**Child/children**	**Practitioner**	**Date**
			Description
	Photo(s)		

2 **What does this experience tell you about me?** Think about my interests, dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge and my understanding. Link to *Aistear*'s themes, aims and learning goals.	

3 **What will we do next to support my learning?** Think about how you can help me to learn more in ways that excite and interest me.	

4 **I want to show my family what I can do.** Let me bring my learning record home so I can share it with my family. They love to see and talk to me about what I'm learning.	Parent's/Guardian's signature: _____ Date: _____ Comment:

This resource was developed through the *Aistear in Action* initiative.

Appendix 13 Event Sample Questionnaire

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath-Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Event Sample

Child's Name:		Date:	Notes:
Observer(s)			
Targeted Behaviour			
Child's Age			
Time	Antecedents (What came before)	Behaviour (Targeted Behaviour)	Consequences (What came after)
:			
:			
:			
:			
:			
:			
:			
:			
:			
:			
:			

-

Event sample taken from Janet Harvell and Samantha McMahon

Appendix 14 Timetable to meet with Early Years Educators- Cycle One

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath-Ollscoil
Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Timetable to meet with participants for team meeting

Cycle one:

Day	Time	Date	Room
Friday	12.30pm	21st January	GH Room
Friday	12.30pm	28th January	GH Room
Friday	12.30pm	4th February	GH Room
Friday	12.30pm	11thFebruary	GH Room

-

Appendix 15 Parents/Guardians Questionnaire

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
Early Childhood Education

Parents/Guardians Survey

1. Do you find it easy to communicate with Little Heroes employees?

☐   Yes
☐   No

2. Do you feel you have a good understanding of Little Heroes Policies?

☐   Yes
☐   No

3. Do you feel your thoughts, opinions and suggestions are well valued by little heroes?

☐   Yes
☐   No

4. Do you have a good relationship with your child's teacher?

☐   Yes
☐   No

5. Do you believe your child gets enough attention from their key worker/?

☐   Yes
☐   No

6. How well does Little Heroes consider the individual needs of children?

-

☐   All of the time
☐   Most of the time
☐   Some of the time
☐   None of the time

7. Do you find our parents communication channels easy to use?

☐   Yes
☐   No

8. How well do you feel the pre-school has adapted to online learning?

☐   Very satisfied
☐   Somewhat satisfied
☐   Not satisfied

9. Do you believe your child gets enough attention from their key workers?
☐   Yes
☐   No
10. Do classes at little heroes start to early, too late or the right time?

☐   To early
☐   Too late
☐   Right time

11. What other information would you like to get about your child's progress, please comment below.

_____

12. How well does little heroes support your child's development?

☐   All of the time
☐   Most of the time   ☐   Some of the time
☐   None of the time

13. How well does little heroes consider the individual needs of children?

☐   Very satisfied
☐   Somewhat satisfied
☐   Not satisfied

14. What other information would you like to know about your child's day?

_____

_____

15. Do you have any concerns you would like to address?

16. Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix 16- Team Meeting One

Team Meeting Agenda (21ST of January)

A reminder before we begin this team meeting, that participants can opt out of the study at any point. All participants will remain anonymous and thank you for your participation. Let's us start by discussing what's on our team meeting agenda.

1. Transitions in the pre-school setting

2. Outdoor environment

3. COVID-19

4. Parental partnerships

5. Supporting positive interactions

6. Access and inclusion

Appendix 17-Transcript Team Meeting One: Cycle 1

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
                                        Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
                                        Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
                                        Early Childhood Education

Transcript from Team Meeting 1 (21st January 2022).

In attendance: IB, KK, LD, CC, JD, TS, JS

I think

IB: Hello and welcome to our first meeting today, I would just like to thank you for all agreeing to participate in my research and I am looking forward to our journey together and to enhancing our practices. The first question that I'm just going to ask is how do you feel the current daily practices for transitioning into the setting in the morning are working?

JD:

KK:

TS: since the onset of the pandemic how transition practices happen within the setting have dramatically changed it is out of our control we are governed by all the different bodies we have to implement plans policies procedures in order to keep our staff the children safe it has been an immensely challenging time it has altered our practices I think for a long time

JS: I feel that the new outdoor environment while I am delighted that we have it it has made the morning transition time harder for children because we are getting the children to enter through the nice wooden gate and we're asking them to line up when really we know that the children just want to go and play it's like bringing them to a playground and saying Oh no you can't go in there

LD:

CC: I'm not too worried about the children in my class they seemed to transition quite well the new outdoor environment hasn't really impacted them but I think for my class it's different because we have seamless provision we have our allocated time and the children they know that but maybe as well my children are the older ECC class three-year 2 VC so they have been here done that before so they sort of know what to expect so I think for them it is easier they don't find the transition as challenging as the other class however there is days which are more challenging than others it also doesn't help that
when we open the gate it opens in the wrong direction m

All participants share the same concerns about the daily routine and parental involvement he wants local ways children transition into and around the setting we discussed high relationships with educators and children impact on positive transitions we then moved on to how we could support such relationships. KK suggested listening to the children seeing what worries them what excites them what might influence them while JD suggested giving children time to talk and time to reflect and to absorb the information. I stated to all the participants that I observed that the relationships between the children and the educators appear to be strong and supportive stop we spoke about how children are finding some transitions very disruptive. I spoke to the educators about the daily routine for transitioning into the setting in the morning and how it was interfering with both smooth transitions and relationships. We also spoke about how that ECC room did not offer seamless provision I stated that due to the design of the building and the situation of the classroom that it was not feasible for seamless provision as there was no direct access to the outdoors and the current practices required educators and children to walk over 50 meters through the garden and through numerous doors and access zones to get to their classroom KK stated thought this was a daily problem for her while JD stated that she found it hard to keep the children in line. TS stated thought we had no other choice when covert hit this research only choice for this classroom all participants agreed that the initial morning transition into the setting was the most difficult for this cohort of children LD stated that the children arrive at 9:15 for their ECC session when they arrived they must line at the fence they must wait until all the children are in attendance before they can transition indoors and due to the location of the classroom and due to the fact that parents are not allowed into the setting that this poses a problem for her on a daily occurrence JD stated that sometimes the parents are late for the session while KK stated that most of her parents are on time Bush it's problematic for a couple of parents because of the school next door and the starting times for the school next door are the same starting times for the children who were doing the ECE preschool LD stated if the child is running late for the session this causes extra pressure on the children and on the educator it can become very stressful very quickly as the children get frustrated and bored waiting in the line I be I agreed that this was not the most ideal solution I suggested that we reflect and think about how we could enhance this transition for the children and the educators JD stated that before COVID-19 transitions were obviously easier children were dropped their room by their parents there was no waiting around and the children just

used to run in. I suggested I suggest that we should talk to the parents and explain to them that the session starts at 9:15 and that if they're going to be late to ring ahead. LD suggested that if not they go straight to their office and children would have to be brought down to the classroom by the manager I agreed that this could be a solution if the issue persisted. Participant CC stated that the transitions in the morning suited her and her cohort of children as she has seamless provision in her room she feels the children are straight into the gate and straight into the classroom she suggests that there's no messing and that there's no parents hanging around chatting either CC also stated that she had no experience with what it was like before covert as this was her first job in an early years setting and she was a novice. Participant TS stated that her biggest challenge was the child with additional needs as he was always trying to get in first or out first he always wanted to open the doors and he'd always end up pushing his friends over and this caused a conflict and upset amongst the children. IB suggested that the children pair up and hold hands. I be suggested contacting the access inclusion mentor within our facility to discuss activities which would support the child behavior and communication and how to interact with other professionals LD stated that she got great advice before from the access and inclusion mentor Sissy suggested using different practices such as holding onto a rope as they transition through one environment to another while JD suggested or stated that this would not work as they had to transition through different zones and access points within the facility and that meant there was a lot of doors to be opened and closed.

1.Transitions into pre-school.

that before COVID-19 transitions were obviously easier children were dropped to their room by their parents there was no waiting round the children just too used to run in IB suggested that we talked to the parents and explained them about the session starting at 9:15 and that if they're going to be late to ring ahead LD suggested if not they'll have to go straight to the office and the children will have to be brought down to the classroom by the manager IB I agreed that this would be a solution if the issue persistsIB: I have been observing the children since the Christmas break and I have observed some children finding the transition difficult, I am trying to understand why they are finding this transition difficult as before the Christmas break, they were all settled. Does anybody else share this concern?

JD:

CC:

ST: yes, they are a little unsettled, I suppose their just out of their routine.
VMC:

LD:

  2. **Outdoor environment.**

IB

JD:

CC:

ST:

VMC:

LD:

4. Parental Partnership- IB:

JD:

CC:

ST:

VMC:

LD:

1. Daily Routine: what would you like to improve about the daily routine?

IB: I feel that my practices have become very adult-led since the pandemic.

IB

JD:

CC:

ST:

VMC:

LD:

3.Covid-19. With restrictions still in place, it is hard to plan for anything really, but we need to consider how we can enhance our practices either way. If covid has thought us anything, it has thought us that

> **IB**   How is Covid 19 effecting your practice?

> JD: we're kept going with the cleaning, its never ending.

> CC: There is a lot of equipment in the room, its hard to clean everything.

> ST: staffing is my biggest concern; I really hope this wave is nearly over.

VMC: It is hard to keep up with the cleaning, they handle everything.

LD: I think the children have very little choice in their activities,

4.**Parental partnerships**- is there any way we would link in more with families? Like i know that COVID is high in our community at the moment, but I really feel that parents and children are really missing out on interactions within the early years setting.

5. Supporting positive Interactions:

6. Access and Inclusion:

IB: Lets discuss how provision is for the two children who require aim, how do you feel they have transitioned since the Christmas Break. Do you think we need to consider talking to the access and inclusion officer again? Is there anything I can do to further support you. Do you feel that changing the morning routine would hinder this child more? Do you think we should perhaps discuss changes with the child and parents first? could we possible pair the child with a peer or a educator, perhaps we if change our practice and make a new routine he would feel more secure at times of transition. Do you feel that his lack of verbal language is impeding his participation. I think i would suggest making sure this book is up to date and go from there. I know it is only the three weeks in January, but this terms always goes by so quick and the access and inclusion officer may not be available to come to us for a few weeks so i think it is worth a call.

Appendix 18-Transcript from Team Meeting two: Cycle One

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
              Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
              Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
              Early Childhood Education

Transcript from Team Meeting 2 (st January 2022).

In attendance: IB, KK, LD, CC, JD, TS, JS

1.Transitions into pre-school.

IB: how have the transitions been since we last spoke

JD: it's still manic the children are visibly upset coming in

CC: I know it's winter but I really feel the children just want to play they love the new outdoor environment there's so much it is so much to offer them now and they just want to explore it

ST: I feel like we really need to enhance both the indoor and outdoor environment that's why it was so important for me to get that climbing frame put in all be it I know in winter time when it wouldn't be used at the most but we had the funding and it was the best thing that we could think of for the children as you all know you've been asking for long enough for that outdoor environment

VMC: could we not write a letter to the parents and ask them to provide Wellington boots and winter like winter suits this would mean that the children wouldn't get mucky or if they did get mucky that it would be on a suit that was easy to wipe

LD: yes I agree I think the children love the outdoor environment but I think we need to look at our practices to perhaps we could think about bringing some of our indoor practices outside like for example let's paint outside let's do our tech side let's read stories outside let's invite the parents in when we can there's so much we can do I've what I've learned from college is that we can have the envir or the curriculum outdoors is equally as important as the curriculum indoors just because we have new climbing frame it shouldn't impact on everything but it might help smooth the transitions if we thought about changing them

KK: I agree I think we need to look at the daily routine it's been that way since the last staff member left just before COVID and while there's nothing wrong with the daily routine it just

doesn't fit this cohort of children and I think sometimes in practice the children can get lost in our day-to-day practices.

IB: do you feel the children would transition better if we changed the routine?

LD: I absolutely do feel that if we change the routine it would enhance how children transition. I feel like we're not listening to the children they're telling us that they want to play they're showing us that they don't want or they want to play they're showing us and telling us that they don't want to do certain activities but yet we are doing the activities I think we need to question why we're doing the activities and what is it achieving for the children not what's achieving for the adult TS: that's all very well and good but we all know that we have inspections. IB: I agree I know we have inspections but I also think we need to think about our practices and to prove that what we're doing in practice is valuable that the children are benefiting from what we're doing so perhaps by changing our practices that would make the transitions smoother

KK: I agree, in college this year we are learning so much, but it is also hard to always make the changes.

JS: I have not taught about how the children transition within the routine before. I guess for me…

I've never really thought as much about my practices as I have this year but I think that's because of my new learning. IB: do you feel the college is enhancing your practices?

IB: I suppose ……. I can relate to what you're saying when I was doing my course I felt the same you're learning all this new knowledge and you want to implement this new knowledge sometimes you can sometimes you will sometimes you can't and sometimes they just keep trying I guess there's no right or wrong way and I guess that's the reason why having even this meeting is so relevant because we are reflecting on our practice we are engaging in changing our practice and we're doing it together as a community so I suppose that's why we're engaging in a Co-op community of practice. has anybody any suggestions how we could reduce other transitions throughout the day or is it just this initial morning transition that is posing the problem I feel from the observations that I've taken for my baseline data that the children are going through several transitions that perhaps they could do without I'm just wondering how I'm going to reduce these transitions is it the practice is is it the curriculum so for the next meeting I'm going to critically reflect on my own practices and see how I can reduce the transitions that the children are encountering.

JD: do we have a transition path policy in this setting IB: very valid question my answer is yes there is a transition policy but it is really only four vertical transitions and what I mean by vertical transitions is the transitions that children take for example from preschool to primary school that would be known as a vertical transition where a horizontal transition is the try and like the activities that the child does within the day and then many transitions would be the activities that are done throughout the day. TS: I guess we need to get a transition policy in place perhaps we could work on a transition policy together. LD: we could also involve the parents. IB: parental involvement has been hugely impacted within the setting because of covert hasn't it how are you finding practices lately? Do you feel the parents are still on high alert over COVID do you feel that they're more relaxed about COVID. I know in government they have been talking about um relaxing some of the restrictions so hopefully that would mean that possibly by the end of this semester which would be in June thus we won't have to have some of these practices in place has anybody any concerns about parental involvement JD: it's just so sad we used to have such good relationships with all the parents now I feel we hardly know them we're afraid to talk to them they're afraid to talk to us it's very

different now it's just a case you come in you do your work your mind the kids and you say goodbye to them there's no hanging around there's no conversations there's no walking no banter though it's really different it's called I facts is old KK I feel that my parents are always rushing from A to B I feel that the car park hinges interaction so a little bit because we have a small car park and because of all the different EC times and with the school times the parents all seem to be rushing for me to be so that doesn't help Sissy I don't know any better to me it's fine I suppose for me it's different because all of these other girls had experience of what it was like with parents before COVID where I've no experience in that field but they tell me that they it was better. I suggested that maybe we could try and change the outdoor play time originally it had been timetable from 11:30 to 12:15 which would mean that the children had 45 minutes to play outdoors but really in reality there was probably only 30 minutes by the time you get their coats on and get them outside and get them through all the doors and get them out to the allocated garden JD: yes it's a little bit more difficult now since all the gardens have been partitioned off because of COVID it's like trying to get through a locked maze Bush anyway it works at least now there is more room for all the different children and the different age groups to be outside and interacting together all participants agreed that they felt that the garden was not being used properly that the allocated times weren't being used and that was frustrating for some as some educators prefer a balance of indoor and outdoor curriculum I propose that we change the garden time from 9:15 from when the children enter to 10:00 AM that would give 45 minutes of pure outdoor play it would also give us an opportunity to have extra time in the garden if parents wanted to have a little conversation they wouldn't feel they were rushed in rushing or rushing them and this also might support the children transition easier and provide them with a transition space maybe it might offer them a bit of continuity as well because when they come in they know that they're going straight to play that would mean that there is no sudden transitions indoors no circle time is it also reduced a number of unnecessary transitions within the day like for example I observed the other day the children coming into the setting I observed the children lining up the setting I observed the children at the gates I observed the children going through the gates I observed the children taking off their coats I observed the children washing their hands I observed the children drying their hands observed children going into classroom I observed the children sitting in a circle time I observed the children entering into an art activity there was just a number of unnecessary transitions there I had felt that if the children had had playtime outdoors they wouldn't have had to wash their hands I also feel that if we offer the children outdoor play that they would feel that we're actually listening to them

IB

JD:

        I think by providing the children with our play it often more of a playful start to their day JD I think it would help with parental involvement too I feel that I don't know a lot of this year's parents a lot of them are new parents with children who are coming to this setting for the very first time a lot of them have no siblings and would not be used to our ethos and therefore they're not getting well I feel that they're not in getting the fun other feel of the place I be I agreedCC:

ST:

VMC:

LD: I suggested the current practices are not working and they're causing the children unnecessary anxiety and that from Monday morning that we implement the garden time at the earlier time and then we could start out from there and look at ways to further reduce our transitions and plan for our transitions as we go JD: suggest that instead of asking the children to line up at transition time that we use a whistle she stated that from previous experiences she used to work with a girl who used a whistle instead of using her voice when outdoors the idea was you blow the whistle once to warn the children that's getting close to going into indoors or transitioning and then you blow the whistle 5 * 1 after the other and dead by the time you get the 5th whistle the children would be in the line doing this continuously over a number of days and weeks the children become used to it and they learned to line up so it just means that you reduce your voice I be I suggest that's a great idea especially for outdoors 'cause in that big garden it's very hard and sometimes children won't hear you so you feel like you're shouting at the children to get them to line up to transition indoors

Appendix 19: Transcript from Team Meeting 3: Cycle One

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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Transcript from Team Meeting 3 XXXXXst January 2022).

I B: how do you feel the new daily routine is impacting on the children all participants stated that the children were more engaged throughout the activities JD stated that one of her parents had had come to her today and stated that she was so happy that today was the first time that she got some news out of her daughter she said to me that was the first time her daughter had come home to tell her her news that she was thrilled to hear how happy she was. Jointly the educators agreed that the children were happier and excited to come in they were more excited to be able to run around and play together in the morning LD: spoke about how she had noticed a significant change in all the children to behaviors were much improved they seemed happier they seemed more content KK suggested that for her child with additional needs that initially he found the transition to be hard but now after nearly a week he is finding as much easier and he is much happier JS **stated today was the first time child be handed me Freddy he has never let go of Freddy since September but today was the first day he handed me Freddy and said I'm OK will you mind Freddie I think that says it all for me the changes definitely supported him to transition better Ivy do you feel that the lining up initially when they came into the setting was a problem do you think perhaps we should think about the transition spaces that we're**

offering children is this new transition in the morning offering me more opportunity within the curriculum to change and enhance the curriculum by listening to the children in what they want and especially at times of transition

In attendance: IB, KK, LD, CC, JD, TS, JS

IB

　　JD: KK: I asked KK how she was finding the planning of activities now and how the new routine was suiting her she stated that it gives the children more choice they are happier I asked her how child F um how his behavior was no since we changed the morning routine she stated that he was happier that he got his wishes that he got to play in the morning there was no lining up he was happier to play it was smoother it was a significant change for him he's adjusting well to the new routine KK has also suggested that we use sand timers and visual timers within the room if we're making any further transitions she stated that this would help the children to know concept of time and how long they have before they have to transition LD stated that this was a good idea that she has used an timers before and they appear to be working this also meant that the voice of the adult was not always telling them what to do that the sand timer would show the children that it's time to transition I I be stated that once I was in the garden and I had a child who was finding the transition from outdoors into indoors particularly hard and that I just happened to be holding a piece of chalk at the time and that child was pretending to be stuck in muddy puddles so I decided that I would draw muddy puddles in the shape of circles from where he was standing to the door and that I told him that he jumped from one muddy puddle to the other thus we would eventually get to the door and this made the transition much smoother for him but this was just one example of how something so simple can make such a difference to practice CC:

ST:

VMC:

LD:

　　St we also need to think about ways that we can support and develop children friendships by budding systems to provide encouragement and security in new situations so perhaps like the buddy system St observed children during periods of transition monitored their emotional development their coping strategies and any indicators of stress St: like if covert has taught us anything it's sawdust that we can be resilient like we've managed to settle in new children through our Gardner area by providing the parents and the child with the security blanket to get to know the staff before they transition indoors like obviously it's not ideal but what could we do during that. LD providing time for children to visit the new room informally that was impossible during COVID because of the play pads we were not led mix between the play pads or were not allowed mix between the play pads IB do you feel you're more aware now of ways to consider how to remove or to enhance transitions within the setting do you feel that the relationships that we have with the children impact on the transitions now do you feel the parental involvement has enhanced because we've changed our practices do you think by changing that initial morning time routine fried or play thoughts IB

JD:

CC:

ST:

VMC:

LD:

Appendix 20: Transcript from Team Meeting 4: Cycle One

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
Early Childhood Education

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Transcript from Team Meeting 3 XXXXXst January 2022).

In attendance: IB, KK, LD, CC, JD, TS, JS

Appendix 21- Transcript from meeting One- Action Research Cycle Two

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

 Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
Early Childhood Education

.

Transcript from Team Meeting 4 XXXXXst January 2022).

In attendance: IB, KK, LD, CC, JD, TS, JS

Appendix 22- Transcript from meeting Two- Action Research Cycle Two

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
Early Childhood Education

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Transcript from Team Meeting 2: Cycle 2 XXXXXst January 2022).

In attendance: IB, KK, LD, CC, JD, TS, JS

Appendix 23- Transcript from meeting Three: Cycle Two

Roinn Frobel Don Bhun-agus Luath- Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Frobel Department of Primary and
Early Childhood Education

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Transcript from Team Meeting 3 XXXXXst January 2022).

In attendance: IB, KK, LD, CC, JD, TS, JS

IB (Ingrid) Researcher

Appendix 24: AISTEARSIOLTA Template

The AISTEARSIOLTA Toolkit can be accessed o http://www.aistearsiolts.ie/transitions

Self-evaluation Tool
Supporting Transitions (Birth-6 years)

AistearSíolta
Practice Guide

Connections to *Aistear* and *Síolta*

Aistear
Themes: *Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking.* Guidelines *for good practice: Building partnerships between parents and practitioners* (pp.6-25), *Learning and developing through interactions* (pp.27-30 and 46-47), *Supporting learning and development through assessment* (pp.78-79)

Síolta Standards
1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3
6: *Transitions*, C13.1, 13.2, 13.3
Research Digests linked to the above *Standards*

Using the Self-evaluation Tool

This **Self-evaluation Tool** supports you, either as an individual practitioner or as a team, to reflect on how you manage transitions in your setting. Some aspects of supporting transitions are covered in the *Building Partnerships with Parents* pillar.

1. This tool is divided into **4 elements**.

   1. Moving from home to a daycare/sessional setting
   2. Transitions within the daily routine
   3. Room to room transitions
   4. Transition to primary school

2. Each element has a **series of statements**. For each statement, choose which of the following best reflects your current practice.

Never/Rarely	I seldom do this.
Sometimes	I do this if and when I remember.
Regularly	I try to do this as often as I can.
Almost Always	I do this most of the time.

If you would like to make notes or record examples from your practice about any of the statements, a box is provided for this.

1   aistearsiolta.ie

NCCA

150