The University of Notre Dame Australia

ResearchOnline@ND

2016

Play - lost in transition? Teacher beliefs about pedagogic continuity across the transition to formal schooling

Linda Bellen
The University of Notre Dame Australia

PLAY – LOST IN TRANSITION?

TEACHER BELIEFS ABOUT PEDAGOGIC CONTINUITY

ACROSS THE TRANSITION TO FORMAL SCHOOLING

A thesis submitted to

The University of Notre Dame Australia

in fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD)

by

LINDA BELLEN

November 2016

School of Education

Principal Supervisor: Professor Marguerite Maher

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Linda Bellen, declare that the work contained in this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Education, University of Notre Dame Australia is wholly my own work. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed

Linda Bellen

DEDICATION

To my beloved late father,

a truly amazing man who taught me the value of life-long learning

and who so rejoiced in the beginning of my thesis odyssey but sadly did not see the end.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of many special people.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the guidance, support and encouragement of my supervisors. To my principal supervisor, Professor Marguerite Maher, I thank you whole heartedly for your thoughtful insight, guiding input and honest, critical feedback. These are what provided many 'aha!' moments when I felt at my most challenged. You are an inspirational mentor and encouragingly supported me through my transition from teacher to researcher. Your infinite positivity and endless enthusiasm about this research study kept me going through what were some of my darkest personal events and gave me a clear focus when I felt there was none.

To my co-supervisor, Sandra Lennox, my deepest appreciation for your valuable advice, unwavering support, reference guidance and editing expertise. You were always available, generous with your time and patiently listened to my reflections and frustrations over endless cups of coffee. Most importantly, your caring friendship and understanding sustained me through all the challenges of PhD research.

To Dr Sean Kearney, heartfelt thanks for your informative guidance in providing clarity in all matters of case study research.

To my colleagues and fellow teaching staff at Notre Dame, thank you for your time in providing support and encouragement over chats in the corridors and being obliging sounding boards when I needed to voice my exasperations.

To the research participants, my gratitude for your interest and willingness to participate in this study and giving up valuable time to share your thoughts and perspectives.

To dear friends, who tolerantly allowed me time away from many social events and buoyed me through all the up and downs.

And lastly, to my loving family – my husband, whose cooking repertoire grew exponentially throughout this time as he patiently held down the fort, and to my beautiful girls who unwearyingly kept wondering when my enormous homework would end. It has!

ABSTRACT

In the current educational climate of teacher accountability, high-stakes assessment and outcomes-based learning, play as a valued pedagogy is being questioned more than ever. In Australia, the recent push-down effect of an academic curriculum has resulted in the 'schoolification' of prior-to-school settings, with less emphasis on play-based pedagogy. Traditionally, in early childhood education, the dominant pedagogy is play-based and is used to support and facilitate children's learning, while in schools learning is more formalised, directed and structured with the presence of a mandated curriculum. This ideological divide in pedagogical approaches between the two contexts is first evident as children begin the transition toward their first year of school. Some emerging research proposes that a major contributing factor in children's difficulties in adjustment and subsequent success in school is the discontinuity in pedagogy between the two contexts. Few studies have focused on teachers' experiences of using play-based pedagogy in the Australian context within the transition to formal schooling. Using a qualitative case study approach, this study explored how teachers' educational beliefs about play-based pedagogy contribute to their constructs of pedagogic continuity across the transition process. It also investigated how the different pedagogies and curriculum documents that exist in prior-to-school and school settings contribute to teachers' constructs of continuity in teaching and learning, and determined their pedagogic practice within the transition to formal schooling. Bronfenbrenner's (1995, 2001) bio-ecological model was utilised as the theoretical framework in the design of this study, and in interpretation of the data. Findings revealed that while educators in both settings championed the importance of play, their beliefs of its value as a 'pedagogical priority' were more evident among the prior-to-school participants. Furthermore, although the notion of pedagogic continuity is unclear to educators, they emphasise that the differences between prior-to-school and school are too extreme, increasing calls for stronger communication channels between the two settings. Moreover, pressure from 'top-down' pedagogy feeds a focus on child readiness notions and the play/work divide, pushing play to the sidelines. Barriers to the use of play-based pedagogy in the transition phase included a number of internal and external factors. These findings highlight a dilemma - that locating a place for play within the learning environment, beyond prior-to-school settings, is problematic.

Key words: play, pedagogy, transition, early years, teacher beliefs, Kindergarten, continuity

PUBLICATIONS

PUBLISHED PEER REVIEWED PAPER (Appendix 1)

Maher, M., & Bellen, L. (2015). Smoothing children's transition into formal schooling: Lessons learned from an early literacy initiative in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, Australia. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 43*(1), 9-17.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Nov, 2012   NSW Institute of Educational Research conference, Sydney
             Presentation of thesis proposal

Nov, 2015   NSW Institute of Educational Research conference, Sydney
             Presentation of initial research findings of PhD study

Oct, 2016   Early Childhood Australia (ECA) biennial conference, Darwin
             Presentation of PhD thesis research findings
             Title: Play – Lost in Transition? Teacher beliefs about pedagogic
             continuity across the transition to formal schooling

Table of Contents

TABLE OF TABLES

TABLE OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"There is a growing impression among practitioners, researchers, and the media that in the past two decades, preschool and kindergarten classrooms have rapidly become more academically oriented and less focused on exploration, social skill development, and play"

(Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016, p. 1)

Introduction

The quote which begins this study highlights the tensions and pressures that currently exist across the transition to formal schooling around the globe. The statement also underlines the dilemma of locating a place for play-based pedagogy much beyond the prior-to-school years. This study is timely because of the changing landscape of early years education in Australia, particularly the current spotlight held on improving effective transitions for children. The transition to school is a significant milestone in young children's lives and a successful transition paves the way for future academic success and positive social outcomes. The move from prior-to-school settings into the first year of school in Australia (called Kindergarten in the state of New South Wales where the study took place) marks a change from a play-based learning environment to a more formal academic classroom and the challenge of adjusting to a new setting.

This qualitative case study explored prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers' educational beliefs about play-based pedagogy and constructs of pedagogic continuity in the context of children's transition to formal schooling. The focus on transition to school was chosen because this is the critical point in the pedagogic divide and the Kindergarten year would be the initial link to familiar play experiences that children first experience between the two contexts. The study also investigated how the different pedagogies and curriculum documents that exist in prior-to-school and Kindergarten settings contribute to teachers' constructs of continuity in teaching and learning, and determined their pedagogic practice within the transition to formal schooling. There was a specific focus on teachers' perceived

roles in play-based learning and teaching to understand whether they believed this to be an effective means to promote pedagogic continuity in the transition process. Also, systemic factors that influence teacher decisions whether to use play-based pedagogy were examined and detailed what continuities exist between the two sectors to develop an understanding of the relationship between prior-to-school and school settings. The review of the literature on the transition to school undertaken for this thesis revealed mounting concern around the loss of play-based pedagogy in early years education and the impact of this phenomenon on pedagogic continuity across the transition process. The literature also supported the concept that achieving effective transitions is dependent on the degree of pedagogic continuity between the two sectors of education and it is this issue that was investigated in the current study. Additionally, the bi-directional connections and forces of the various environmental ecosystems in which the child exists strongly influence the effectiveness of the transition to school.

1.1   Background and justification of the study

Traditionally, in early childhood education, the dominant pedagogy is play-based and is used to support and facilitate children's learning, while in schools learning is more formalised, directed and structured with the presence of a mandated curriculum. A key difference in Australia now seems to be that although play-based learning for four year olds predominates in prior-to-school settings, that pedagogy is less well established in the first year of schooling. This ideological divide in pedagogical approaches between the two contexts is first evident as children begin the transition toward their first year of school. The transition to school not only marks a shift to a more formal education context but also a change in curricular documents.

In the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW), the education system is governed by various curriculum documents underpinned by differing philosophies. Curriculum documents impact on teachers' perceptions of pedagogical practice and so their understandings may transform the context in which children learn (Synodi,

2010). The use of different curriculum frameworks in the two sectors can be an impeding factor for teachers in supporting pedagogical continuity. A close analysis of such documents is necessary to determine if there is a separation of play from pedagogy, to ascertain whether they are unified and have a shared meaning of play as a valued pedagogy or whether there is a work-play dichotomy.

For the purposes of the current study, transition is defined as the process of moving from one educational setting to another. The notion of transition extends beyond a narrow view of the process in terms of current orientation programs offered and encompasses the year leading up to, and including, the first year of school. This situates transition to school as a process occurring over time and as an extended pathway. The transition from prior-to school settings and entry to Kindergarten is a significant event in many children's lives during which demanding changes may be experienced. In recent times it has become a topical issue and there is a growing awareness of the importance of this period in early years education both internationally and nationally (Alatalo, Meier, & Frank, 2016; Broström, 2005, 2013; Dockett & Perry, 2008, 2013, 2014; Fisher, 2011; Huser, Dockett, & Perry, 2015; Mirkhil, 2010; Mortlock, Plowman, & Glasgow, 2011). Research evidence suggests that a successful transition from a prior-to-school setting to the first year of formal schooling is very important for children's adjustment and subsequent academic achievement (Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Duncan, Claessens, Huston, Pagani, Engel, Sexton, et al., 2007; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).

Much research has been undertaken in this area and it is clearly recognised that a positive transition involves carefully planned and managed activities in consultation with all of the key stakeholders and a strong emphasis on building collaborative relationships (Ashton, Woodrow, Johnston, Wangmann, Singh, & James, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2004, 2008; Petrakos & Lehrer, 2011; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Effective transitions are those that build on children's previous experience and involve reciprocal communication between educators in both sectors (Alatalo et al., 2016; Boyle & Grieshaber, 2013; Chan, 2010;

Connor, 2011; Fabian, 2007; Henderson, 2014). Nevertheless, some children still find the transition daunting, stressful and negative.

Teachers in both sectors understand the implications of their pivotal role in providing assistance and support to help children experience effective transitions. A crucial factor that has emerged in recent literature is the role of the teacher in successful transitions (Ackesjö, 2013a; Dockett, 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Harrison, 2015; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006; Petriwskyj, 2013). Teachers in both sectors who facilitate the transition process have the potential to influence the outcome of transitions, positively or negatively. Differences in beliefs and practices held by teachers in prior-to-school and Kindergarten rooms may result in creating stressful challenges and discontinuity for children across the transition process (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Timperley, McNaughton, Howie, Robinson, 2003). There is some emerging research that suggests that a major contributing factor in children's difficulties in adjustment and subsequent success in school is the discontinuity in pedagogy between the two contexts (Grieshaber, 2009; Harrison, 2015; Kauerz, 2006; Kelman & Lauchlan, 2010; Petriwskyj, 2005, 2013). Teachers' pedagogical thinking and views about how they implement play-based pedagogy are vital to understanding pedagogic continuity across the transition process. This study therefore investigated this area.

The challenges that teachers and children experience across the transition process, particularly in terms of pedagogic continuity, can result from the existence of different pedagogies and curriculums in the two sectors of education. To assure continuity of learning for children, it is important that teachers in the early years of education carefully consider and question their pedagogy and pedagogical practices when organising, managing and implementing transition processes. Giving voice to teachers is an important first step so that we can listen to those in the field and understand some of the influences on their pedagogical decision-making across the transition process. It is essential that teachers reflect on their understandings about play-based pedagogy, particularly within the context of the transition to school, since this would be expressed in their teaching practices. When teachers' voices are

foregrounded within rich descriptive studies it may be possible to examine the intricacies of their views about pedagogic continuity and the transition process and extricate factors that contribute to supporting more seamless, effective transitions for children. More research needs to be done in exploring where play-based pedagogy and curriculum divides meet. As Petriwskyj (2013) remarks, "limited attention has been given to the pedagogic changes associated with the transition from play-based programs into formal school classes" (p. 45). If efforts to improve successful, smooth transitions are to be realised, teachers' voices in future research need to be foregrounded. The present study extends the current limited literature on the transition process from the perspectives of those who experience and implement it.

Calls from families and government departmental policies, together with the introduction of high-stakes testing in many countries such as Australia, all place pressure on teachers to provide a stronger focus on academic skills (Curwood, 2007; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). In Australia, the recent push-down effect of academic curriculum has resulted in the 'schoolification' of early years learning, with less emphasis on play-based pedagogy (Jay, Knaus, & Hesterman, 2014; McGregor, 2010; Petriwskyj, O'Gorman, & Turunen, 2013). These demands have undermined traditional developmental approaches to education such as play-based learning (Goldstein, 2007). This presents a dilemma for educators who do not consider such pedagogy to be the fundamental focus of learning in children's first year of school. To resolve this dilemma, one strategy that has emerged from the related literature is to promote greater continuity in pedagogy between the two contexts (Harrison, 2015; Smith, 2015). The issue of pedagogic continuity in transitions is one that necessitates further attention from policy makers, schools, families and particularly educators involved in developing transition processes. Given that processes are implemented at the teacher level, the idea of using the discourse of play as a valued pedagogy to promote continuity of learning and teaching is of vital importance to the present research. Therefore, this raises the question of whether the use of play-based pedagogy to support continuity of learning and teaching is key in this process.

Although substantive research (Alatalo, Meier, & Frank, 2016; Broström, 2005, 2013; Boyle & Grieshaber, 2013; Dockett & Perry, 2004; 2007a; 2008, 2013, 2014; Fisher, 2011; Petriwskyj, 2013) has been carried out on the topic of the transition to formal schooling, few studies to date have attempted to establish the association between the transition process and teacher beliefs about play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity, particularly in the Australian context. This study drew upon research that explored the phenomenon of pedagogic continuity within the context of the transition to school process.

1.2 My personal perspective and rationale for the study

The impetus for this research has evolved from a three-fold interplay of various professional and personal experiences throughout my life: my previous work as an early childhood teacher, my current position as a university tutor and professional experience advisor in early years education, and my role as a parent of two children who have both transitioned to 'big school'.

It is this last role that has particularly provided me with a pressing concern and motivation to instigate this study. I felt a strong sense of anxiety and concern for my youngest daughter as her orientation period to her first year of school approached. Whilst I sat throughout the various family information sessions of the school's home-link transition program and listened to detailed explanations of the school's literacy and numeracy approaches and statistics, I could not help but wonder: "where was the place for play within all this academic learning?" How would *my* child, one who thrives in the world of play, cope with all these new challenges? Indeed, how would many other children manage such expectations?

In the early weeks of my daughter's first year in school, as I sat and reviewed her *Best Start Kindergarten Assessment* (see 2.3) and deliberated if indeed this document was describing her accurately, I recollected my many years of supporting prior-to-school children transition to school. This process, I felt, had never truly been a collaborative partnership between the two sectors of education.

As an early childhood educator, I never felt that I was a valued or equal partner and was very rarely consulted or considered by teachers in the schools receiving the children I had taught. I diligently completed detailed summaries of children's learning and handed them over to anxious parents to deliver to the entrant school but rarely received feedback as to whether these had been read or considered by the new school teacher.

I also reflected on my twelve years' experience as an early childhood practicum supervisor and mentor of teacher education students in two Sydney universities. It became apparent to me that the once prominent status of play as the prevailing medium for learning and teaching in our early years settings has itself shifted. Student teachers placed in rooms with children who were about to transition to school often complained of their struggle to implement meaningful and authentic play experiences in settings that obliged them to plan exercises using writing stencils and other tightly scheduled ostensibly school readiness activities. What I had observed was an academic push-down effect into our early childhood landscape. Educators in these centres struggled to reconcile their personal beliefs in play with expectations from corporate administrators and family expectations of structured, visible academic content in the programs. What had crept in to many corners of early childhood centres in the rooms of older prior-to-school children were worksheets and stencils, teacher-directed alphabet-learning approaches, and 'school readiness' programs. The educators had made decisions as to whether or not to implement play-based experiences in their rooms and also to what degree. Why do some educators vehemently believe in play as a legitimate pedagogy and others do not? In order to further understand the basis for such decisions, particularly in the context of the transition to school, I felt I needed to probe further into research about play-based pedagogy and explore teacher beliefs and understandings of pedagogic continuity across this process. Additionally, as a reflective educator, I considered it vital to explore the impact of pedagogy on successful transitions. I began to think, have we swung the focus from child experiences to child outcomes? Have we lost our ability to defend the value of play and its role in children's learning? I pondered…has play been 'lost in transition'? Miller and Almon's (2009)

words began to ring strongly in my ears that, "the traditional kindergarten classroom that most adults remember from childhood – with plenty of space and time for unstructured play and discovery, art and music, practicing social skills, and learning to enjoy learning – has largely disappeared" (p. 42).

1.3   Reflexivity and my role as a researcher

Patton's (2015) definition of reflexivity as the "ownership of one's perspective…a critical self-exploration of one's own interpretations" (p. 70) has guided me throughout this study so that my aim has been to be aware of the beliefs and values that I bring to the research process. Additionally, in order to come to know myself within this continual, relational process, Lincoln, Lynham and Guba's (2011) explanation of reflexivity as "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher" (p. 124) so that there is "a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent" (p. 124) has directed me. This relational premise implies that "inquiry is intervention…in this sense, inquiry draws from and can contribute to the daily lives of participants" (Hosking & Pluut, 2010, p. 68). Thus, the multiple identities we bring to the research process are essential to acknowledge and interrogate throughout to impart clarity to how the research is shaped and presented. It is important to be conscious that, as the sole researcher of this project, I have direct access to all aspects of the construction of the study and that this can influence the nature of knowledge produced within it (Sarantakos, 2013). I have tried to be mindful of the possible bias that I may hold toward this research topic. As an early childhood trained educator, I have a vested interest in play-based pedagogy and particularly the notion of promoting pedagogic continuity across the transition process. Throughout this study, I remained resolute in being focussed on my role as a researcher.

1.4   Aim and purpose of the study

The primary aim of this qualitative study was to explore educational beliefs concerning pedagogic continuity and the use of play as a medium for learning and teaching from the perspectives of Australian prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers. The intention was to examine this notion in such a way to facilitate the participants to offer rich, deep personal insights. Hearing teachers' opinions and getting a sense of their beliefs and views about play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity can be a meaningful and insightful way to understand their pedagogical thinking and hence their pedagogical aims. The fundamental idea of whether these teachers considered play-based pedagogy to be a significant factor in supporting pedagogic continuity in effective transitions was central to this study. Internal and external influencing factors were also investigated as they can influence whether or not individual beliefs can be implemented, and highlight the tensions and dilemmas that teachers regularly face. Data were collected through two sources, in-depth interviews and document sources with the intent that they would provide a vivid, detailed understanding of the research topic.

Another goal of this study was to situate the transition to school in a theoretical framework that fittingly acknowledges and accommodates the complexities of this process. The investigation of this phenomenon steered to the selection of a comprehensive ecological system model, which became the theoretical framework of the current study and centred on the role on a vital stakeholder within this. Whilst transitions involve many key stakeholders (children, families, teachers, administrators, community organisations) with significant research about their views, this study was not focused on children's or families' perspectives of transitions, but on teachers' perspectives of the transition process and their use of play-based pedagogy within this. Additionally, the term 'educator' will generally refer to professionals working in prior-to-school settings and 'teacher' will denote those working in the school sector. However, in discussions that includes both groups of participants throughout the study, the term 'teachers' will be used. Whilst teachers do not hold complete control over transitions, they are critical players and

contributors who implement the process, and so were the key participants of my research. A key stage in the study was to listen to educators in the field to understand how they viewed and whether they implemented play-based pedagogy in the two educational contexts. My aim was to probe beneath teachers' personal constructs of play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity so that they could articulate their own views and beliefs. Despite the significant body of research that exists supporting the value of play for young children's learning, teachers who work with these children often have difficulty articulating their rationale for a play-based approach or explaining how learning and teaching is facilitated through play within the curriculum (Aldridge, Kohler, Kilgo, & Christensen, 2012; Myck-Wayne, 2010). Educators' beliefs on play and play-based learning largely determine whether such approaches become part of the pedagogy of play in the discourse of transitions. Transitions are complex, and given the diversity of teachers and their varying pedagogical practices, they have differing experiences of their roles in the facilitation of the transition process (Lickess, 2008; Peters, 2002) and this, I feel, was important to explore.

1.5 The research questions

The overarching research question was:

How do teachers' beliefs about play-based pedagogy contribute to their constructs of pedagogic continuity across the transition to school?

Three subsidiary research questions were developed to provide a framework for the study, to guide the interview procedure with teachers and to support the presentation and analysis of data.

1. How do prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based pedagogy?
2. What do prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?

3. What factors influence prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers' decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?

The findings from the answers to these questions have implications and relevance for teachers working with children in early years education and who are involved in the transition process.

1.6   Theoretical framework

Teachers who implement and manage children's transition to school operate as part of a wider system and the external associations within this have the potential to influence and impact teacher beliefs in various ways. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model of child development, later renamed the bio-ecological systems theory, provides a theoretical framework for understanding the complexity of the transition process. It recognises that the transition process is context bound and frames the theoretical basis for this study. Whilst this was designed to embrace an individual's entire life span, I use this framework to specifically examine the transition to school. In Bronfenbrenner's earlier construction of the ecological model, a major contributing factor to children's learning and development was their environment and the interactions they have within this. He viewed this environment as being made up of four different interconnecting systems, which impact on children's development either directly or indirectly. Children belong to and have links with these various systems and these links can change at any level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Just as Bronfenbrenner proposed that the child is influenced by these four ecological systems, so too is the teacher. A graphic representation of the key elements within each of the nested four ecological environments in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model as related to the current study is presented in Figure 1.1.
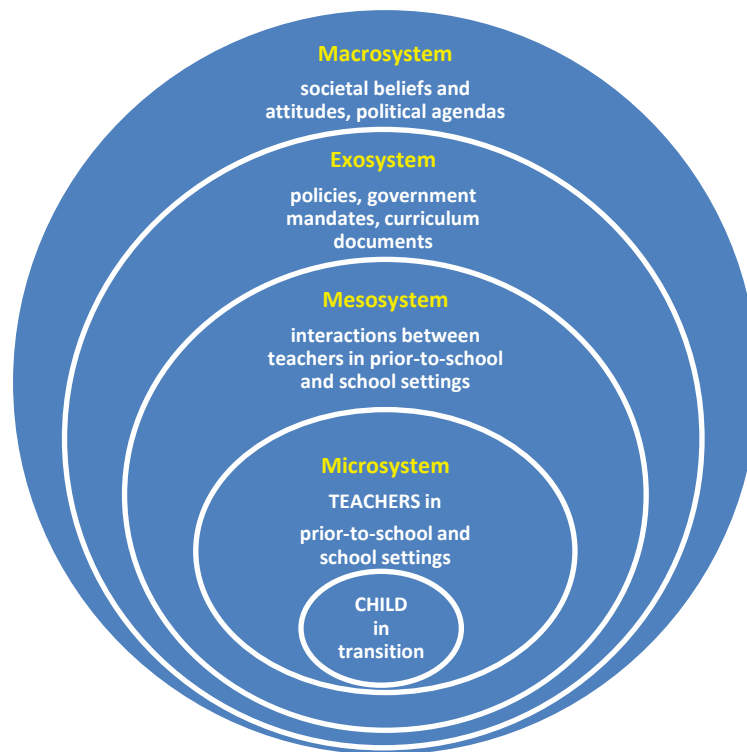
Figure 1.1   The transition to school as related to the current study (adapted from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory)

Bronfenbrenner (1995, 2001) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (1998) reworked bio-ecological system theory proposes an inter-related four component Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model. This newer conception emphasises more dynamism, a clearer distinction between environment and process, whilst continuing to recognise the effect of relationships between the ecosystems, as well as the introduction of the impact of time. Bronfenbrenner (2001) himself notes that "the element of *time* has special importance" (p. 7, italics in original). For the current study, all four elements of this model are present. Hence, the revised model stresses the interplay of multiple factors and can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the elements at play across the transition process. These include: the proximal processes in the immediate microsystem and between microsystems – or the quality of interactions in the classroom and the role of relationships between teachers in the different sectors; the characteristics of the individual – thus the quality of transition experiences can be determined by 'person' factors which include teacher beliefs; context-based factors in more distal ecosystems; and the

temporal broader context which recognises the crucial time of educational transitions as a long term process. This model is valuable in determining the quality of proximal interactions associated with the individual and others as it emphasises the manner in which the interactions can be improved. The higher the quality of interactions within the microsystems and across the mesosystems, the better and more effective the transition experience will be for children. Figure 1.2 illustrates the PPCT model as relevant to the current study.
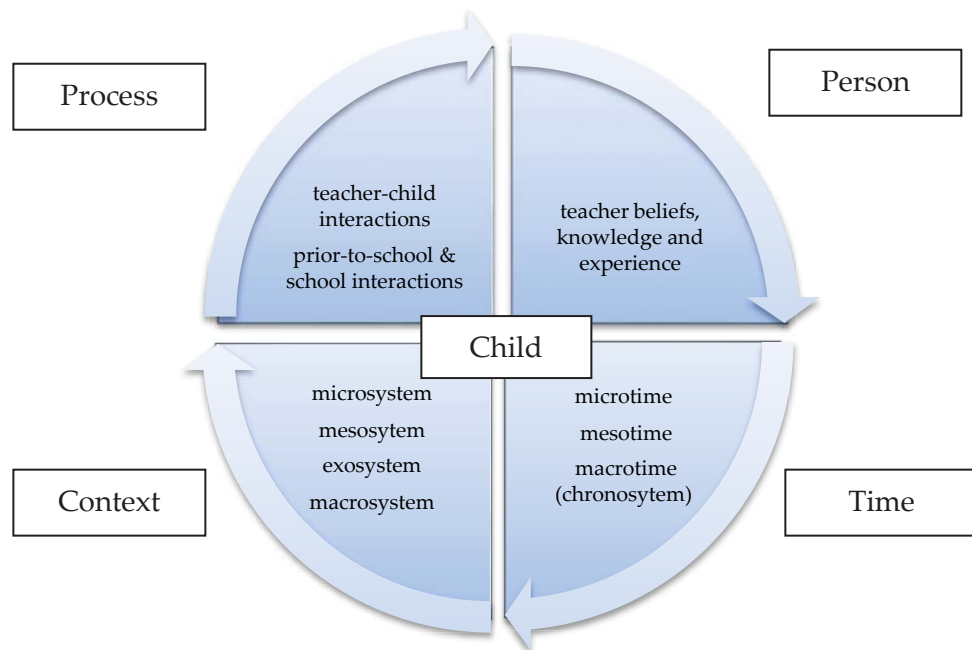
Figure 1.2   *Adapted PPCT model for the current study*

1.6.1   *Process*

The microsystem is located in the inner core of the bio-ecological model and it is here where the progressively complex, interpersonal interactions that are sustained over time exist and are known as proximal processes. While these proximal processes are considered the core of the PPCT model, Bronfenbrenner (1995) also reminds us that an individual's personal aspects can lessen or intensify the power of those processes to influence development, behaviour and learning. In terms of the transition to school and the current study, such processes therefore

include the reciprocal interactions between the child and teacher in play-based learning and also those connections between teachers involved in the transition process across the two settings which can affect the degree of pedagogic continuity.

1.6.2   Person

Person characteristics relate to individual variables such as dispositions, beliefs, knowledge, and skills required for the effective functioning of proximal processes, and these can directly or indirectly influence the proximal processes. It is in this later model that Bronfenbrenner made clearer the individual's role in changing their context and for the current study, the exploration of teacher beliefs and their impact on pedagogic continuity in the transition to school is significant.

1.6.3   Context

Context refers to the different environmental layers or ecosystems, ranging from the increasingly encompassing levels of the micro- to macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) original model was conceptualised and structured as a series of nested systems called: the *microsystem*; the *mesosystem*; the *exosystem*; and the *macrosystem*.

The microsystem encompasses the child's most immediate environment, such as the classroom, and is "a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 39). It is within this most central layer that proximal processes operate to produce and support development and the "form, power, content, and direction" (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 621) of proximal processes in shaping human development is influenced by context. It is the level where teachers operate and where teaching and learning occur. According to this theory, children will experience difficulty in exploring other levels, or parts of their environment, if the relationships in the proximate microsystem break down (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A particular issue relevant to the current study is the change between microsystem contexts as experienced by children as they move across the different educational settings.

The mesosystem consists of the linkages and processes between the microsystem settings, such as prior-to-school and school contexts. As Bronfenbrenner (1994) explains, "a mesosystem is a system of microsystems" (p. 40). The relational networks that exist in this level can impact directly on children's transition. If the transition process is to be effective and successful, rich mesosystem links that embrace communication and collaboration between the key participants are essential. If strong connections are not present between teachers in both sectors, this will affect how transitions are enacted and so the degree of pedagogic continuity evident. Similarly, if microsystems favour divergent pedagogies, tensions arise; as a consequence the child may experience pedagogic discontinuity while trying to manage the opposing microsystem values.

The exosystem is "an extension of the mesosystem embracing other specific social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). Thus, this refers to the external environments – the larger community and how these indirectly influence the individual. This ecosystem incorporates decision making and events that transpire outside of the sphere of the individual's immediate environment, but the outcomes of which impact on his or her experiences directly or indirectly. In relation to the transition to school, the media, the regulatory government bodies and their directives, educational administrators, and national curriculum documents that reside within this level all influence teacher beliefs and the quality of children's transition experiences.

The macrosystem forms the most distal, overarching environment of a given culture and encompasses the values, customs, beliefs systems and bodies of knowledge "that are embedded in each of these broader systems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). This outer level envelops the other ecosystems, influencing and influenced by all of them. It can be considered as the societal blueprint. Bronfenbrenner (1977) notes "what place or priority children and those responsible for their care have in such macrosystems is of special importance in determining how a child or his caretakers are treated and interact with each other in different

types of settings" (p. 515). If we wish to gain deep insight into teacher beliefs and children's experiences of transition, consideration must be afforded to the central, prominent ideologies of a society.

This nested framework, with an emphasis on the significance of context, positions the individual at the centre of a complex web of interactions that occur across diverse social and cultural contexts. The relationships between the different contexts, or ecologies, in which children participate are central to this model, and transition experiences and opportunities are affected by the connections between these settings. Thus, teachers will play a significant role. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasises that it is important to bear in mind that all the interactions and relationships are bidirectional and reciprocal. His proposition of reciprocity (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) is useful to understand the interrelationship between the settings and is valuable when examining beliefs. Beliefs are subject to internal and external influences as well as having an effect on immediate and more distal settings. Thus, teacher beliefs shape the pedagogy and learning environment in which they work but also are affected by the beliefs of families, administrators, government directives, and societal attitudes and values.

1.6.4   Time

The time concept incorporates the fifth system that was added later by Bronfenbrenner (1986), called the chronosystem (the evolution of the external systems over time). This dimension acknowledges the time episodes in which the proximal processes take place (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), including time during specific episodes of proximal processes (microtime), broader time intervals of proximal processes (mesotime), and time changes in terms of expectations and events in the broader society (macrotime). A focus of a simple chronosystem could be on a particular point in historical time such as the transition to school in the current study.

This study captures the beliefs of key stakeholders in that transition, the prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers, and to determine if their beliefs are associated with the pedagogical practices they use across the transition process.

Hence, this study further pursues to identify the relationships between their beliefs about play-based pedagogy and their constructs of pedagogic continuity in the transition to formal schooling in Australia.

1.7   Summary and outline of thesis

The thesis comprises seven chapters. This preliminary chapter introduced the research problem and research questions together with the background and impetus for the study. Also, the rationale of the study was described and Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model was examined as a useful theoretical framework to demonstrate how his PPCT model informs our understanding of the transition process on a number of levels. Chapter Two presents a critical review of the literature and provides the scope of the extant research base underpinning the research topic. The methodology is described and justified in Chapter Three and puts forward the rationale for the case study design for this research, while Chapter Four presents the findings of the interviews together with the document analysis to introduce the resultant categories and themes. Chapter Five depicts the case study reports grounded in the voices of the teachers. The cross case analysis forms the basis for a critical discussion within the context of the literature and theoretical framework in Chapter Six. The thesis concludes with Chapter Seven where the significant findings, recommendations and limitations are considered.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

"The traditional importance given to play as young children's natural way to learn has become less important today"

(Russo, 2012, p. 3)

Introduction

In order to contextualise the current study and to paint the background to the study, the literature is structured as follows. First, there is an exploration of what research and the literature provide on the topic of transitions and specifically transition into formal schooling. Second, there is discussion around the notion of school readiness and ready schools. Third, there is a clear description of early childhood education and formal schooling in Australia, specifically in New South Wales (NSW), with related pedagogies which are driven by specific curriculum and support documents and teachers' roles within those pedagogies. Fourth, the impact of teacher beliefs and perceptions on teaching practice are explored. Fifth, the construct of play and play-based pedagogy are examined including attention to the barriers to play, and last continuity and pedagogic continuity are addressed and considered in relation to the two key curriculum documents used across the transition process.

2.1   What is transition?

Transitions play a significant part throughout our lives and involve a process of change in state from one form, phase or place to another. In most Western cultures as children begin their passage in the educational process, transitions from one educational setting to another represent an intricate part in their experiences (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; McIntyre, Blacher, & Baker, 2006; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Many children today in Australia have experiences in prior-to school settings, such as preschools, before entering school. The transition

to school and the entry to Kindergarten (first year of formal schooling in NSW) signify an important event in the lives of children and their families (Ashton et al., 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2001, 2004, 2008; Fabian, 2012; Kagan, 2010; Margetts, 2002, 2009; Pianta, 2004; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Rosier & McDonald, 2011; Yeboah, 2002). This is not only a key experience for children but also for teachers in both preschool settings and Kindergarten (Dail & McGee, 2008; Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (DEECD), 2009; Dockett, 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; 2014; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Harrison, 2015; Henderson, 2014; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006; Petriwskyj, 2013).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), a transition has occurred when an individual's position in his or her ecological environment "is altered as the result of a change in role, setting, or both" (p. 26). The transition to school is defined as the process of movement from one phase, or context, of education to another (Broström, 2002; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Yeboah, 2002) and the period when children change their role in their community to become students in school (Dockett & Perry, 2012a; Griebel & Niesel, 2002). More recently, Dockett and Perry (2014) propose that "transition to school is taken to be a dynamic process of continuity and change as children move into the first year of school" (p. 2). In terms of when this occurs, Fabian and Dunlop (2002) suggest that the period of transition from prior-to-school settings to school commences at the preschool level (the year immediately before Kindergarten), followed by an initial settling-in stage, and continues until the child feels settled and established in the new school environment. Broström (2002) refers to this as supporting children to "feel *suitable* in school" (p. 52) such that they have a feeling of well-being and belonging. Dockett and Perry (2007b, 2012a) propose that this process commences long before children enter formal schooling and continues well after they have entered the Kindergarten year. Such definitions move beyond short orientation periods and induction events, characteristic of many transition programs, to transition being a lengthy process (DEECD, 2009; Educational Transitions & Change (ETC) Research Group, 2011; Fabian & Dunlop 2007; Johannson, 2007; Petriwskyj, 2010).

The transition to the first year of formal schooling is multidimensional and complex (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Snow, 2006), and involves a major change and period of adjustment in children's lives (Eckert, McIntyre, DiGennaro, Arbolino, Perry, & Begeny, 2008; Margetts, 2005, 2009; Peters, 2010). It is no doubt then that some researchers and educators report the existence of a *gap* (Dunlop, 2007; Fabian, 2002a*)* or *chasm* (Peters, 2014) between early childhood and school settings. Indeed, many others describe the disparities between these two sectors and the discontinuity that exists (Bennett, 2013; Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; Boyle & Grieshaber, 2013; Henderson, 2012; Lickess, 2008) sometimes with irreconcilable differences (Moss, 2008). Children need to negotiate a range of differences that exist between these two environments in terms of structural changes, different pedagogical approaches and altered demands and expectations (Bennett, 2013; Dail & McGee, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007b, 2012a; Huser, Dockett, & Perry, 2015; Kelman & Lauchlan, 2010; Skouteris, Watson, & Lum, 2012). These bring a mixture of excitement, anxiety and in some instances, substantial challenges (Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo, & Cavanagh, 2011; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). Some children will be more successful than others at meeting these challenges (Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) & Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2009; Dockett & Perry, 2012a). Hence, continuity between the prior-to school and school settings is essential to consider in the transition process (Noel, 2011; CCCH, 2008; Skouteris et al., 2012) to avoid "learning shocks" (Fabian, 2013, p. 48).

There is increasing evidence that how each child responds to school impacts on future educational and socio-behavioural experiences and progress (Dockett & Perry, 2003, 2007b; Duncan et al., 2007; Eckert, McIntyre, DiGennaro, Arbolino, Perry, & Begeny, 2008; Peters, 2010; Sayers, West, Lorains, Laidlaw, Moore, & Robinson, 2012). Easing the transition to ensure success warrants the need for collaborative communication, with careful planning and consideration, particularly between teachers in the two sectors of education (Collie, Willis, Paine, & Windsor, 2007; Hopps, 2004; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; McGann & Clark, 2007; O'Kane, 2015, 2016; Sanders, White, Burge, Sharp, Eames, McEune, & Grayson, 2005). A positive start has the potential to not only assist children's future academic and

social competence (Dockett, Perry & Kearney, 2010; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003), but also ensure that families and children feel valued and comfortable in school (Dockett & Perry, 2003, 2004, 2008; McGann & Clark, 2007).

2.1.1   *Transition to formal schooling research*

The research base covering this topic spans the last 50 years and transitions have been studied from a multitude of perspectives. Earlier transition research tended to conceptualise transition as a 'one point' event such as the first day of formal schooling. More recent research since the 1990s has shifted to encompass studies that view transitions as a multi-year and multi-layered process (Petriwskyj, Thorpe, & Tayler, 2005).

The transition process is currently a hotly debated topic in both the international (Alatalo et al., 2016; Broström, 2005, 2013; Einarsdottir, 2006; Fisher, 2011; Karila & Rantavuori, 2014) and Australasian context (Dockett & Perry, 2007b, 2013; Huser, Dockett, & Perry, 2015; Margetts, 2005; Mirkhil, 2010; Mortlock, Plowman, & Glasgow, 2011; Sayers et al., 2012). The existence of extensive Australian research studies, policy briefs, topical papers and several literature reviews reflect the increasing interest in the topic of transition to formal schooling across the country. National government initiatives, such as the *Best Start Kindergarten Initiative* (NSW Department of Education & Communities (DEC), 2009), and the many diverse transition programs, statements and policies that have been developed at state or school level also reveal the growing attention in this area (Binstadt, 2010; Hirst et al., 2011; Sayers et al., 2012).

Numerous international transition studies have examined the links among specific types of prior-to-school experiences and children's degree of success after they enter school (Ashton et al., 2008; Collie, Willis, Paine, & Windsor, 2007; Margetts, 2002). An extensive amount of this literature deals with collaborative partnerships and home-school links (Giallo, Treyvaud, Matthews, & Keinhuis, 2010; Hopps, 2014; McGann & Clark, 2007; Petrakos & Lehrer, 2011; Pianta & Craft-Sayre, 2003; Shields, 2009) and many studies deal with school readiness concerns (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Daughterty, Howes, & Karoly,

2009; Noel, 2010; Stipek, 2002; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Other recent literature, rather than evaluating whether a child is school ready, considers the notion of 'ready schools', including the impact of pedagogical changes on school success in the early years of school (Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani, & Merali, 2006; Broström, 2002; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008; Noel, 2011; Petriwskyj, 2005; Sayers et al., 2012). Findings from the current study contribute to this area of research.

The significance of successful transitions for children has been well documented (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002; Niesel & Griebel, 2007; Petriwskyj et al., 2005) and the literature is replete with content analysis of effective transition activities and the nature of successful transitions (Dockett & Perry, 2001, 2004, 2008; Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Margetts, 1997; McGann & Clark, 2007; Noel, 2011; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Research exploring transitions which considers the multiple variables that relate to the stakeholders has been undertaken in countries such as Australia (Dockett & Perry, 2001, 2003, 2004; Dockett, Perry, & Kearney, 2010; Margetts, 1997, 2002, 2005, 2007; Petriwskyj, 2010, 2013; Petriwskyj et al., 2005), United States of America (Dail & McGee, 2008; Laverick, 2008; Miller, 2015; Pianta, 2004, 2007; Ramey & Ramey, 2004), Europe (Broström, 2002, 2005; Carida, 2011; Einarsdottir, 2003, 2006), the United Kingdom (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002, 2007; Lam & Pollard, 2006), and Asia (Chan, 2010; Li, Mak, Chan, Chu, Lee, Lam, 2012; Yeo & Clarke, 2005).

For the purposes of the current study, a successful transition has occurred if the child has adjusted emotionally, physically, psychologically and intellectually (Yeboah, 2002), as this has been shown to be predictive of future academic achievement (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Department of Education & Training, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2003; Margetts, 2007; Peters, 2010; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Children's transition and adjustment to school, and subsequent progress, is influenced by various interdependent factors. These include factors associated with: the home; language and culture; children's personal characteristics; and pedagogical approaches and the school (Margetts, 2002, 2007).

Much transition research has been large scale quantitative research (Boethel, 2004; Nelson, 2004; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005; Silvers, Measelle, Armstrong, & Essex, 2005) that addresses policy issues rather than investigating issues related to improving the transition process as enacted by key participants such as teachers. Recently in Australia, two such significant large scale studies were developed to measure process and impact indicators of the transition to formal schooling: the *2009 Australian Early Development Index*, now known as the *Australian Early Development Census* and the *2012 Outcomes and Indicators of a Positive Start to School*: *Development of Framework and Tools* research project (Sayers et al., 2012). While such research provides a greater understanding of how to measure outcomes and indicators of positive transitions, they present little in the way of useful data for those who enact the transition process.

Such studies cannot accurately document and describe key processes of continuity and discontinuity in children's transitions to formal schooling. There is limited research available that offers evidence about the use of effective pedagogies to support the development of seamless transitions and what key contributors find most valuable to ensure continuity of learning and teaching. This is particularly important in light of children considered at risk because of certain factors such as socio-economic status (Arndt, Rothe, Urban, & Werning, 2013; Miller, 2015; Ramey & Ramey, 1999; Schulting et al., 2005) or English as an Additional Language (Centre for Equity & Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2005a, 2014; Hirst et al., 2011). These children have been found to be less prepared for school if they do not experience a high quality transition process (Fantuzzo, Rouse, McDermott, Sekino, Childs, & Weiss, 2005; Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle, & Calkins, 2006). As a result, different transition objectives, that include the use of familiar play-based learning experiences, may be required to improve diminish the disparities children encounter.

There is also a growing body of research that addresses children's views and the inclusion of their voice within the transition process (Dockett & Perry, 2003, 2005a, Perry & Dockett, 2011; Einarsdottir, 2007; Griebel & Niesel, 2000; Potter &

Briggs, 2003; Wong, Wang, & Cheng, 2011; Yeo & Clarke, 2005). This research points to a focus on children's views about the significance of play in their learning environment and the desire to participate in play-based experiences in the early years of formal schooling (Di Santo & Berman, 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2012b; Fisher, 2009; Li et al., 2012; Mirkhil, 2010; Mortlock, Plowman, & Glasgow, 2011; Sanders et al., 2005; White & Sharp, 2007). Children described school as a relatively joyless environment where serious learning occurred with little or no play. One of the earliest findings of the *Starting School Research Project* by Australian researchers, Dockett and Perry (1999, 2005b), was that what mattered to children in the transition to formal schooling was different from what was important for the adult stakeholders. Children noted that school was a place to learn and that this learning was viewed as teacher-directed and not as a process of active manipulation of materials or ideas (Dockett & Perry, 1999). Children, like many adults, have been sold the line that play is something pleasurable but unrelated to learning.

For all children, the transition to school marks a change in their identity and status – the shift from a child to a pupil. With this new identity, children need to negotiate all the intricacies of a school's culture, particularly the way in which teaching and learning is conducted (Fabian, 2007). There is a significant shift from a play-based pedagogy in prior-to-school settings to a more structured, cognitive learning environment in formal schooling (CCCH, 2008; Dockett, 2011; Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD), 2006; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). In order to cope and adapt, many children require significant support to accept this new context. The success of children's transition most often depends on pedagogic continuity and the different pedagogies between the two contexts is a known barrier to seamless transitions (Ackesjö, 2013b; Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Dunlop, 2003; Fisher, 2011; Harrison, 2015; Neuman, 2005; O'Kane, 2016; Sanders et al., 2005; Walker, 2007; Yelland, Lee, O'Rourke, & Harrison, 2008).

2.1.2   *The transition to school in Australia*

Historically, Australian schools and ECEC services have not been well integrated and so have not been able to provide cohesive support for families and

their children (CCCH, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007b). There have been many state and community-led efforts of transition to school related programs that have involved collaboration with educators, families and community members (Binstadt, 2010; Dockett & Perry, 2008; Hirst et al., 2011; Sayers et al., 2012). Most transition programs are developed at the school level. The fairly recent 2011 *Transition to School: Position Statement* by the Educational Transitions and Change Research Group from Charles Sturt University NSW was developed as an aspirational document to guide policy and practice at all levels. It aimed to promote an increased recognition of the significance of the transition to formal schooling based on research evidence. In NSW, the Department of Education website offers access to several 'transition to school' support documents including the *Transition to School Planning and Implementation Matrix*, the *Transition to School Action Plan*, the *School A-Z Organiser*, plus additional links to transition and research information. In 2014, the NSW Minister for Education announced the release of the *NSW Transition to School Statement* (New South Wales Government, Department of Education & Communities (NSW DEC), 2014.) This statement was designed as a tool to support children and ease their transition from early childhood education to formal schooling. Early childhood services complete this in collaboration with families to provide teachers in primary schools with information about a child's interests, strengths and capabilities, and approaches to learning. This information is provided on a voluntary basis by both the child's early childhood educator and family members and then forwarded to the intended school to assist in planning and preparation for the child's transition. Up until this time, a formal transition reporting system in NSW did not exist and the sharing of information about a child's learning and development between school and early childhood services was on an ad hoc basis.

Research from Australia indicates that when children transition to formal schooling, 10-21 per cent experience difficulties in adjusting (Giallo, Treyvaud, Matthews, & Kienhuis, 2010). Furthermore, almost 24 per cent are vulnerable in no less than one of the following areas: social competence, language/communication and cognitive skills, physical well-being, emotional maturity and general

knowledge (Centre for Community Child & the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2009). There are four specific groups of Australian children that find the transition to formal schooling more challenging: those with English as an Additional Language; those who are financially disadvantaged; Indigenous children; and children who have a disability (Anderson, 2010; Bentley-Williams & Butterfield, 1996; Peters, 2010; Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005; Smart, Sanson, Baxter, Edwards, & Hayes, 2008). The greater the discontinuity between the two sectors, the more difficult the transition process will be (Margetts, 2002). The use of different curriculum frameworks in the different sectors can be an impeding factor in supporting pedagogical continuity.

2.1.3   *Pedagogical challenges to children during transition*

A significant factor highlighted in the research is that a change in pedagogy, more than the change of place or expectation, contributes to some children finding the transition to formal school so challenging; it is detrimental to their well-being (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Margetts, 2005; OECD, 2006; Peters, 2010). Pedagogic continuity and a strong understanding between the two sectors is important in successful transitions (Ashton et al., 2008; Broström, 2005, 2013; Cassidy, 2005; Harrison, 2015; Li, Rao, & Tse, 2011; Neuman, 2002; O'Kane, 2016; Yelland et al., 2008). This new emphasis in the literature influenced the specific focus on the current study.

Recently, there have been a number of emerging studies (Boyle & Grieshaber, 2013; Briggs & Hansen, 2012; Devlin, 2012; Harrison, 2015; Hunkin, 2014; Pyle & Bigelow, 2015; Sandberg & Heden, 2011; Smith, 2015; Smith & Maher, 2016 in press; Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013) that have addressed the notion of promoting pedagogic continuity through the use of play-based learning and teaching in the school context and these have clearly demonstrated the positive impact this approach has on students' learning, achievement and importantly, their adjustment to school. This obviously makes sense for as Connor (2012) explains "children do not 'magically' become different kinds of learners as they move from prior-to-school settings into the first year of school" (p. 27). Consistent with this

perspective, Broström (2013) argues for "play as a pivot for successful transition" (p. 37) and suggests the idea of play as a transition bridge, recognising both children's agency and the active role of the teacher in the process so that play fosters the establishment of a learning motive in the new setting. Similarly, Bredekamp (2010) and O'Kane (2016) propose the use of play as a transitory activity, as a means to align the two environments, so that children's learning experiences can be extended from one context to the next. In such studies, the implementation of a play-based approach in the early years of school acknowledges children's prior learning experiences, promotes building on their learning strengths, and reduces the focus on concerns such as teaching to the test or school readiness disquiet and anxieties.

2.2   Notion of school readiness

Although there have long been concerns about school readiness, research interest has increased since the 1990s and it has now become a central issue in current research on transitions (DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008; McGettigan & Gray, 2012; Petriwskyj et al., 2005; Scott-Little, Kagan, Frelow, 2006). This is particularly evident in the studies from the USA and Australia more than from other countries (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2004, 2009; Dockett, Perry, & Kearney, 2010; Farrar, Goldfeld, & Moore, 2007; Gill, Winters, & Friedman, 2006; Graue, 2006; Le, Kirby, Barney, Setodji, & Gershwin, 2006; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Noel, 2010; Snow, 2006; Sorin & Markotsis, 2008). However, tension has arisen around concerns that a narrow focus on children's readiness to start school means they are being measured against a deficit model; an inappropriate one-size-fits-all approach (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011). As noted in Dockett and Perry's (2013) review of Australian and international research about starting school, Australian research is still dominated by a readiness focus, resulting in the development of a range of measures of readiness for example, the *Australian Early Development Index* and the *Best Start Kindergarten Assessment*. Over the last two decades, Australian transition research has centred on binary constructions of children as being either 'ready' or 'unready' for formal schooling (Petriwskyj &

Grieshaber, 2011) even though as Dockett and Perry (2009) remark – a child's readiness for school "is but one element of a successful start to school" (p. 20). Such conceptualisations of the transition process continue to emphasise children's preparation as either developmental or academic readiness and is in conflict with the play-based pedagogies of the contemporary national early childhood framework – the *Early Years Learning Framework* (discussed later in 2.4.1.3). More contemporary transition literature (Brooker, 2008; Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Graue, 2006; Gill, Winters, & Friedman, 2006; Lam & Pollard, 2006) discusses the concept of 'ready schools' signalling a gradual swing away from the 'ready' child toward a new understanding of transition as a partnership with an equal sharing of responsibility among parties.

Testable 'school readiness skills', especially in relation to literacy and numeracy, have become an increased focus for policy makers (Early et al., 2010; Whitebread & Bingham, 2011). Such policies overlook the contexts that shape children's learning opportunities and expect all children to achieve a uniform level of readiness at the same time (Gill et al., 2006). In Australia this is further compounded with the introduction of the *Best Start Kindergarten Assessment* through which teachers assess children's early reading, writing and number skills in the early weeks of school. This perspective unduly transfers pressure onto the individual, saddling the weight of readiness on the child. Difficulties in children's adjustment may be perceived by teachers as lack of readiness rather than the need for pedagogical change. It is not surprising that parents of children in ECEC services voice a preference, or an expectation, for formal, school-like activities to assist their children's preparation for school entry (Graue, 2010; Mortlock, Plowman & Glasgow, 2011; O'Gorman, 2008; Wong, Wang, & Cheng, 2011).

Adding to this is what Moss (2013) explains as the indisputable hierarchical relationship between ECEC and formal schooling. Thus, primary schooling becomes the "unquestioned dominant partner" (Moss, 2008, p. 227) or the "frame of reference" (Moss, 2013, p. 9) for prior-to-school services which take on a more

subordinate role in preparing children to achieve well in formal schooling. What is created then, Moss (2013) asserts, is a 'school readiness' relationship, one in which it is assumed that the lesser level of ECEC serves the needs of the higher level of formal schooling. So, as a result, it is not only expectations and values but also pedagogical opinions and methods that "cascade down the system, from top to bottom" (Moss, 2013, p. 9).

2.3 Early childhood and school education and the Australian context

2.3.1 Early childhood education in the Australian context

The term early childhood is defined variously in different political and cultural contexts and differences exist in the age range that encompasses the term 'early childhood'. According to the definition offered in General Comment 7 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it denotes the period under eight years age (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). In the current study, early childhood is taken to mean the period from birth to compulsory formal school education and is recognised as a separate stage of education, whilst references to early years education includes children in the phases of school up to Year 2 when children are eight years old.

In Australia, ECEC services operate under a very fragmented system with all three levels of government involved, as well as the private sector and community groups (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). On a national basis, there is significant variation between jurisdictions with no overall system design. ECEC services in NSW cater to children under the age of six and include a variety of settings such as long day care, family day care, mobile preschools and preschools. These services are licensed and regulated through the NSW Department of Education (DoE) [formerly the Department of Education & Communities] on behalf of Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). The ECEC service in focus for the current study is preschools in NSW.

2.3.1.1 Quality in ECEC services and the Australian context

ECEC plays an important role in the development of many children's lives in today's society (CCCH, 2006; Stephen, 2006). There is compelling research evidence to suggest that the quality of early childhood experiences within prior-to-school contexts significantly impacts, both in short and long term gains, on the early years for children (Britto, Yoshikawa, & Boller, 2011; Logan & Sumsion, 2010; Logue & Harvey, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, 2007; OECD, 2011; Stephen, 2006). This is further substantiated by data from longitudinal studies in the United States of America such as the *High/Scope Perry Preschool* study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997) and in the United Kingdom such as the *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* project (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). In particular, the *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* project has offered evidence that the provision of high quality preschool programmes can help lessen the effects of social disadvantage and afford children a more positive start to school.

International research suggests that one of the most important determinants of quality is ECEC staff qualifications (CCCH, 2014; Early, Bryant, Pianta, Clifford, Burchinal, Ritchie, Howes, & Barbarin, 2006; Early, Maxwell, Burchinal, Alva, Bender, & Bryant et al., 2007; OECD, 2006, 2011). Programs that provide high-quality education and care, delivered by qualified educators are a key contributor to sound early childhood outcomes (Harrison, Goldfeld, Metcalfe, & Moore, 2012; Tayler, 2010; Tayler, Cleveland, Ishimine, Cloney, & Thorpe, 2013). There appears to be broad agreement that quality ECEC services can influence children's transitions positively and improve readiness for school (Boethel, 2004). Participation in ECEC programs, such as high-quality preschools, may be particularly essential for vulnerable children and may help reduce the negative developmental effects of disadvantage (OECD, 2006; Sammons, 2010; Siraj-Blatchford & Woodhead, 2009; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010). While positive effects of quality preschool education have been established by research evidence, these gains have been found to decrease within a few years of entering school (Jolly &

Orbach, 2008; Kauerz, 2006). A pertinent question to ask is how teachers in both settings can support the positive effects of quality ECEC across the transition process.

Historically, in Australia as in many other countries, there has been a significant gap between the quality of ECEC services and the quality of service provided within the school system (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). This has been reflective of the dominant outlook that older children's education is more important than young children's learning (Ryan & Goffin, 2008), and that school-aged children are away from their families for longer periods of time. Contemporary knowledge and research evidence of young children's development and learning, together with families' employment circumstances have changed such notions.

The discourse of 'quality' has become a central focus in recent early years educational literature and many researchers, governments and early childhood providers have addressed the issue of quality care and education for young children (Britto et al., 2011; Ishimine, 2011). This interest was heightened in Australia with the election of the Rudd Government in 2007 and politicians took particular interest ECEC with the ensuing formation of the Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care (OECECC). This signalled that Australia's Commonwealth Government recognised the worth of investing in ECEC and committed to a series of reforms to steer quality improvement. A central concern was in creating and maintaining high quality childcare and this was promoted in the development of a new National Quality Agenda in 2009. As part of this agenda, a new National Quality Framework for ECEC was introduced in 2012. Key features included the new National Law and Regulations; Australia's first national framework: the *Early Years Learning Framework*, (see 2.10) which guides curriculum and pedagogy in all early childhood settings; the National Quality Standard; an assessment and quality rating process; and an independent national authority; the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). ACECQA's role is to guide and oversee the administration of the National Quality Framework to ensure consistent implementation across all states and territories.

This was very timely as the OECD's *Education at a Glance 2008* (OECD, 2008) informed that Australia's percentage of national income spent on pre-primary education (children three years and older) was among the lowest in the developed world. In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), all Australian State and Territories, in partnership with the Commonwealth Government made a commitment through the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education that;

> by 2013 every child will have access to a preschool program in the 12 months prior to full-time schooling. The preschool program is to be delivered by a four year university qualified early childhood teacher, in accordance with a national early years learning framework, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year (COAG, 2008, p. 5).

Such an initiative reflects that these governments valued the importance of children's early development to outcomes later in life and were paying closer attention to the quality and availability of ECEC services. At the very least, it is heartening to note politicians situating ECEC within a 'professional' discourse (Woodrow, 2011).

Furthermore, from the 18 July 2016, all early childhood teachers in NSW working in long day care and preschools must be accredited by the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards. This signifies that early childhood teachers will be accredited alongside their peers in schools, recognising that they are university trained professionals upholding high standards in teaching practice and who make important contributions to young children's education.

Central to the discussion of quality is quality pedagogy. Research into the quality of pedagogy both in Australia and internationally (Hattie, 2003; Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Elliot, 2002; Stephen, 2010), particularly at the preschool level such as the *Effective Provision of Preschool Education* (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004) study in the United Kingdom, and *E4Kids – Effective Early Educational Experiences* project (Tayler, Cloney, & Niklas, 2014) in Australia,

highlight the importance of quality interactions in child-centred, play-focused environments. These learning environments embrace responsive teaching where adults and children are jointly involved in co-construction of knowledge and sustained shared thinking, in the context of play, within experiences that encompass high challenge episodes (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Sustained shared thinking was described as "any episode in which two or more individuals 'worked together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative… and it had to be shown to develop and extend thinking" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010, p. 157). This perspective presupposes that children's mere participation in play is not sufficiently adequate to create learning. Thus, having a higher percentage of qualified early childhood teachers in early years education who have a distinct focus on curriculum and pedagogy with appropriate specific pedagogic and curriculum knowledge contributes to quality programs for young children. As Wood (2013) explains, "good quality play requires high levels of pedagogical skills and organisation" (p. 14). Such quality learning environments facilitate and smooth the transition to school (Elliott, 2006; Harrison, 2015) by providing pedagogic continuity.

2.3.1.2 Preschools in New South Wales, Australia

Preschools in Australia are those services that provide early education and care between the ages of three and five years, and include community-based, school-based, private sector, and not-for-profit preschools. Preschool attendance is not compulsory but governments aim to promote attendance (Dowling & O'Malley, 2009). NSW suffers from the lowest hourly participation rates with only 66 per cent of children attending the federal government's recommended 15 hours per week (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015) and they are most expensive preschools in Australia. Preschools have programmed play-based approaches with a university qualified teacher (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015) and learning through play is one of the most commonly used practices in early childhood services, such as preschools, in Australia (Barblett, 2010). According to The National Law, a 'preschool program' is defined as "an early childhood program delivered by a

qualified early childhood teacher to children in the year that is 2 years before grade 1 of school" (ACECQA, n.d., p. 1).

Preschools may be stand-alone services or attached to schools. These services are usually run by a parent committee or sponsored by a church, community organisation or local government. Children may attend any numbers of days and the programs operate usually between 9am-3pm, or they may attend sessionally in morning and/or afternoon sessions (NSW DEC, 2012a). In most instances preschools follow the school terms and are closed during school holidays. Staff working in these services can be university trained early childhood teachers, diploma or certificate trained staff. In NSW, qualified teachers are mandated for preschools with more than 30 children.

The Department of Education and Communities (DEC) has approximately 100 preschools that are attached to primary schools (NSW DEC, 2012b). These preschools are managed by the school, the school council, or a parent committee, and the DEC employs an early childhood trained teacher and a teacher's aide in each of the preschool rooms. Generally, these preschools operate during school hours. Most are located in low SES areas and priority is given to disadvantaged children. The majority of children attend part-time and are four years old.

In Australia, during the 1980s a dominance of the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp, 1987) discourse emerged, later revised to include culturally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), and again in 2009 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The original guidelines were strongly based on developmental theory in line with Piaget's cognitive constructivist perspective. This heavily influenced Australia's ECEC such that a large proportion of educators have as their basis the work of Piaget and Bredekamp situated in the framework of active hands-on pedagogy (Fleer, Tonyan, Mantilla, & Rivalland, 2009; Grieshaber, 2008; Kilderry, 2015; Ryan & Goffin, 2008). A central tenet of this outlook is a focus on the organisation of the environment and provision of learning experiences, with a noticeable absence of attention to teachers (Grieshaber, 2008) who tend to be viewed as facilitators or observers (Logue & Harvey, 2009; McArdle & McWilliam, 2005). As

a consequence, add McArdle and McWilliam (2005), the developmental discourse shaped the description of pedagogical work to resist the use of the word 'teaching'. Thus, many early childhood play-based programmes such as those in preschools featured child-centred, age-appropriate ideology grounded in individual children's interests together with documenting and analysing observations in accordance with developmental domains – and still do so today (Fleer et al., 2009; Kilderry, 2015; Leggett & Ford, 2013; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Wood,1997). Hence, teaching is informed by children's developmental needs (Graue, 2008); learning is predominantly through self-discovery play, minimising teacher-directed practice; and the curriculum is matched to children's individual emerging abilities. Grieshaber (2008) has also noted that as a consequence of the dominance of the developmental perspective in ECEC, there has been a lack of research about teaching. The current study contributes to the research base on teachers and teaching.

However, in keeping with a general world-wide educational trend, Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Australia was re-examined and its dominant perspective was challenged by scholars during the mid-1990s (Clyde, 1995; Cross, 1995; Dockett, 2011; Fleer, 1996). This marked a shift in theoretical directions and constructs with the growing interest in socio-cultural theory, which drew on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1996), and a focus on mediation processes of adults and peers who scaffold children's learning and development. Indeed, it was Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) who introduced the notion of scaffolding as they believed that learning transpires in one-on-one interactions with a more knowledgeable person who provides exactly the support needed for learning to progress forward. Later, Bruner (1996) supplemented his ideas to highlight the significance of intersubjectivity, or the joint attention between the expert and novice. Thus, the introduction of socio-cultural theory, together with the principles of Reggio Emilia, marked a paradigm shift in the early childhood landscape in Australia (Edwards, 2007; Fleer et al., 2009) and brought new understandings of how play is framed and used for learning as well as new conceptions of the adult's role. This amended perspective has been further realised

with the introduction of a key component of the National Quality Framework – the *Early Years Learning Framework*.

2.3.1.3 The Australian early childhood curriculum framework

Over the last 15 years, there has been a proliferation of curriculum and learning frameworks for ECEC both internationally and in Australia (Sumsion, Barnes, Cheeseman, Harrison, & Stonehouse, 2009). In 2009, Australia's first national early childhood curriculum framework, *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (*EYLF*) was developed collaboratively by the Australian and State and Territories Governments. It is the first national curriculum statement for Australia's ECEC staff working with children from birth to five years (Connor, 2010; Leggett & Ford, 2013). The *EYLF* may complement, supplement or replace previously existing frameworks within the individual states and territories. The key intent was to scaffold the delivery of nationally consistent and quality ECEC services across the country (Early Childhood Australia, 2011). This purpose of the document aimed to provide ECEC services with a reference point for guiding curriculum and pedagogy, assisting them to achieve the five broad learning outcomes. It also describes principles and practices considered crucial to support and enrich young children's learning, as well as their transition to formal schooling. The framework is centred on play-based pedagogies, intentional teaching, reflective practice and strong relationships with children and families (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009).

When examining the framework more closely, there are two principles that relate directly to teachers involved in the transition process: *Partnerships* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 12) and *Ongoing learning and reflective practice* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13). Both these principles occupy an important role in encouraging educators to develop a culture of collegiality and reciprocal partnerships between the two contexts, and to also engage in critical thinking and reflection about beliefs and practices within processes such as the transition to school which can "motivate them to explore new ideas and approaches" (DEEWR, 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, three of the eight

pedagogical practices that are significant for teachers concerned with the transition to school are *Learning through play* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15), *Intentional teaching* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15), and *Continuity of learning and transitions* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16). As learning through play is the dominant praxis used in the early childhood sector, it is vital that teachers who facilitate and implement transitions understand these key practices as espoused in this document. The *EYLF* defines play-based learning as "a context through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 46). Such a definition strengthens the notion that play is both nationally and internationally esteemed for its impact on the learning and development of young children (Connor, 2010). The role of the educator is a key component of this definition. Teachers need to be knowledgeable and active in children's play and ought to find the balance between child-initiated, child-led and teacher supported learning highlighting that "early childhood educators take on many roles in play with children and use a range of strategies to support learning. They engage in sustained shared conversations with children to extend their thinking" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15).

As a result, the notion of learning through play is being replaced with teaching through play which encompasses a more active role for the teacher, based on concepts such as scaffolding, guided-participation, intentional teaching and co-construction. The term 'intentional teacher' was adopted by the *EYLF* in order to re-define the role of the educator (DEEWR, 2009). Teachers' intentional planning and teaching is fundamental to support and extend learning through play for young children (Epstein, 2014; Gronlund & Stewart, 2011). According to the *EYLF*, a play-based learning approach therefore does not involve adults acting as 'supervisors' to leave children to play on their own. Intentional teaching in the *EYLF* "involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and action. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have 'always' been done that way" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 5). Hence, this denotes a shift away from the more traditional passive role of the educator to one of being intentional (Epstein, 2014; Grieshaber, 2008, 2010; Leggett

& Ford, 2013; McArdle & McWilliam, 2005). However, while the notion of intentional teaching has mobilised interest (Kilderry, 2015), due to a scarcity of context-based research in Australia, what this means for early childhood teachers is not yet clear. The current study contributes to teachers' interpretations and constructions of this new terminology with the potential to strengthen educators' professional identity.

Traditionally, in early childhood education, play-based learning and teacher-directed learning have been considered as a pedagogical binary (Thomas, Warren, & de Vries, 2010). The inclusion of play-based learning together with intentional teaching is a specific focus in this document and moves away from positioning the two as oppositional. Such a national framework that elucidates the value of play and teachers' role in supporting it contributes to the validation of the work of early childhood educators as highly-skilled professionals. However, it appears that this newly introduced term has created some debate and uncertainty as educators grapple with navigating and enacting its interpretation in their daily practice (Leggett & Ford, 2013) and express unwillingness for embracing intentional pedagogies (Kilderry, 2012, 2015). Intentional pedagogies, explains Kilderry (2015), "have been contentious in ECEC, particularly as they can conjure up 'school-like' pedagogies and practices" (p. 21). The challenge it seems is how to find a balance between intentional teaching and child-initiated learning. Leggett and Ford (2013) argue that "more consideration is required in understanding intentionality" (p. 48) so that educators can seek strategies that foster children's innate motivation for independent learning. The present study contributes to the research base on teachers' understandings about their role in play-based pedagogy.

In relation to the transition to formal schooling, the *EYLF* discusses the importance of continuity of learning in children's transitions and on building on young children's earlier experiences. A key aspect in this section is the recommendation for collaboration between educators in both sectors to share information on children's prior learning (DEEWR, 2009). What is not addressed however, is the role effective pedagogies, such as play-based approaches, can

contribute to supporting the continuity of learning and teaching across the transition process.

2.4.   The first year of formal school in NSW – Kindergarten

Within Australia, there are different age criteria and different terminology used for starting school among the states and territories, thus no universal term exists for the educational setting immediately prior to the start of formal schooling. In Australia, the school year begins toward the end of January, and the first year of entry is called Kindergarten in NSW and ACT where children attend five full days. In other jurisdictions, it is referred to as Prep (QLD/VIC/TAS) or Reception year (SA), Transition (NT) and Pre-Primary (WA) (Dockett & Perry, 1999; ACARA, 2012) as depicted in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1   Terminologies for first year of school in Australia

Australian state or territory	Term for first year of school
New South Wales (NSW)	Kindergarten
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)	Kindergarten
Victoria (VIC)	Preparatory (Prep) or Foundation
Tasmania (TAS)	Preparatory (Prep)
Queensland (QLD)	Preparatory (Prep)
South Australia (SA)	Reception
Northern Territory (NT)	Transition
Western Australia (WA)	Pre-primary

Eligibility to start Kindergarten in NSW is based on children who turn 5 years of age by July 31 in that school year, with one intake at the beginning of the year. Most children commence formal schooling between four and a half and five and a half years of age. All children must be enrolled in primary school by age 6 according to the NSW Education Act (NSW Government, 1990). Thus, children

commencing their first year of formal school can vary in age from 4 years and 6 months to 6 years. Government schools in NSW operate through the NSW Department of Education (DoE). In most cases, teachers in Kindergarten hold primary teaching qualifications, however a minority hold early childhood degrees.

In Australia, there is an ideological divide in pedagogical approaches between the two educational sectors when children transition to their first year of formal schooling (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014; Dockett & Perry, 2012a; Henderson, 2012; Petriwskyj et al., 2005). As two services have developed independently of one another, transition marks the delineation between a responsive and a directive approach to education (Wood, 2010b) or a change from play-based approaches to a more academic focus. A responsive approach stems from the view that children's learning depends on the active involvement in preschool life, which involves play and learning. The directive approach differs in that the aim is children's acquisition of the knowledge, values and beliefs of society (Wood, 2010b). Furthermore, in terms of teacher education training, the focus on pedagogical approaches and developmental knowledge is different between early childhood and primary courses, and so impacts on learning and teaching not being viewed as a continuum when children commence school (Lord & McFarland, 2010). The transition to school not only marks a shift to a more formal, structured education context (CCCH, 2008) but also a change in curriculum documents (Petriwskyj, O'Gorman, & Turunen, 2013).

2.4.1 Kindergarten and Primary school curriculum in NSW

In 2011, the first phase of the new national *Australian Curriculum* for the school sector was implemented. The development of this curriculum is guided by the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, adopted by the council of state and territory education ministers in December 2008 (ACARA, 2012). It has a four-dimensional design that comprises: Curriculum content (eight key learning areas and subjects), General capabilities (seven), Cross-Curriculum priorities (three) and Achievement Standards. The *Australian Curriculum* refers to the Kindergarten year as the Foundation year to describe the year prior to Year 1.

This document was written with the supposition that curriculum content for the Foundation year will be taught to all Australian children in the year preceding Year 1. It does not however advocate formalised learning (ECA, 2011) and emphasises that teachers can choose how to introduce concepts. A cogent question posed by Holliday (2013) then asks "so, where does the impetus for more formal learning come from?" (p. 9) and additionally the current study also questions the impetus for more formal teaching practices. There is a need to interrogate whether the pedagogy of Australian early years classrooms is best suited to effective and developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for children in this phase of education. Currently, teachers in schools are not obliged to acknowledge or implement the *EYLF* in any way. As Petriwskyj (2013) notes, the Foundation year content in schools represents the "potential shift from a holistic to an academically oriented curriculum" (p. 20). The enactment of this formal, content-oriented curriculum, together with NSW Syllabuses that assist teachers to implement it, has given rise to whole-class teaching practices and employing direct instruction techniques in numerous early years' school classrooms (Jay, Knaus, & Hesterman, 2014). As Weimer (2013) states, many classrooms are still functioning as teacher-directed learning environments, enacting the curriculum via more formal didactic pedagogies (Luke, 2010). It would appear that the introduction of the *Australian Curriculum* has been misinterpreted by some as the introduction of a set of formal instructional approaches. Lickess (2008) draws attention to how school teachers may consider that 'formal' school is dissimilar to prior-to-school settings and so these variances justify the exclusion of child-centred teaching and learning practices such as play. Thus, here a distinction between the curriculum (what is taught) and the pedagogy (how it is taught) has not been formed (discussed further in 2.7.1.1).

Furthermore, with an emphasis on children's literacy and numeracy development and a predominance of teacher-directed instruction in the belief that the focus on academic learning is effective in preparing children to attain expected outcomes and perform well on standardised assessments, play has taken a backseat in early years classrooms. Also, promoting the prominence of achievement on standardised tests, in 2008, an annual National Assessment Program in Literacy and

Numeracy (NAPLAN) was implemented with the aim of improving learning outcomes for Australian children. School children in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 sit a series of tests that aim to measure their basic skills in literacy and numeracy. These have proven to be a divisive issue in Australian education. Some argue that they provide accountability and transparency; others maintain they exert a push-down effect into lower years with a focus on teacher-centred pedagogies and an increase on time spent on decontextualised literacy and numeracy activities (Dulfer, Rice, & Polesel, 2012; Fleer, 2011b; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2012). Hence, it is important to explore the relationship between influencing contextual factors and teacher beliefs and as pedagogical decision-making is not solely based on one or the other but is a synthesis of the two. The current study contributes to this area of research.

2.5   Teacher beliefs

Existing literature on teachers' beliefs suggests that the beliefs teachers hold deeply affect their classroom practice. As Li (2009) explains:

> If there are three clear messages throughout the literature on teachers' beliefs, they are, first and foremost, that teachers' beliefs have profound impact on classroom life; that the beliefs that impact students are layered, multi-dimensional, sometimes implicit, and difficult to change; and that teachers who fail to examine their beliefs may bring about unanticipated consequences in the classroom (p. 914).

A meta-analysis by Trivette, Dunst, Hamby, and Meter (2012) also established that the beliefs of early childhood teachers do affect their practices. Thus, if teachers' pedagogical beliefs have the possibility to affect teacher practices (Handal & Herrington, 2003; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Li, 2009), this can largely determine how they teach and what will be taught (Donaghue, 2003; Wood & Attfield, 2005), and therefore influence children's success in their first year of school. The educational practices teachers employ are influenced by a belief system that has formed over time through a combination of factors such as acquired professional training,

knowledge and personal experience (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; Kagan, 1992; Nimmo & Park, 2009; Pajares, 1992; Wen, Elicker, & McMullen, 2011). Teachers' beliefs are highlighted in the transition process and fundamental in the shaping of what they practice in the classroom, what is included or ignored, and thus the continuity of learning and teaching.

However, a clear definition for the term 'teachers' beliefs' does not exist and though many attempts have been made, little progress has been reached to date (Konig, 2012). Over 20 years ago, Pajares (1992) undertook the challenge of "cleaning up a messy construct" (p. 307) and stated that teachers' beliefs influence their perceptions and judgements which in turn affect their behaviour in the classroom. The beliefs teachers have about teaching and their roles in learning environments serve to influence and guide them in their practice (Donaghue, 2003). Understanding teachers' pedagogical beliefs can provide insights into how these beliefs affect their practices (Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Konig, 2012; Pajares, 1992) such as those implemented in the transition process, and how these beliefs affect and influence their perspectives on play as a medium for learning and teaching. Indeed, Kagan (1992) asserts that research about beliefs is crucial to educational practice. However, of note is that contextual factors such as teacher-child ratios, setting or school philosophy, supervisory support or lack thereof, parental expectations, professional preparation, and experience may constrain the freedom with which teachers feel able to implement or act on their beliefs (McMullen & Alat, 2002; Wen, Elicker, & McMullen, 2011; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002).

That there appears to be no consensus on what constitutes the term 'beliefs' in the literature is evident and there is confusion on the distinction between the constructs of beliefs and knowledge (Pajares, 1992). Knowledge differs from beliefs as beliefs have a stronger emotional and evaluative element (Nespor, 1987). Knowledge of a field or domain contrasts from feelings about that field. A further distinction is that while knowledge often changes, it has been noted that one's beliefs and values are difficult to alter and remain stable or static (Kagan, 1992;

Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Additionally, knowledge, which is based on objective fact, can be judged or evaluated whereas beliefs cannot (Pajares, 1992).

Pajares (1992) explains that beliefs can be defined in a number of ways and that attention to teachers' beliefs should be a focus of educational research. Beliefs can be explained as values, judgements, attitudes, ideology, axioms, opinions, perceptions, conceptions, dispositions, preconceptions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, perspectives, conceptual systems, internal mental processes, action strategies, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy (Pajares, 1992). The problem that underpins many studies on teachers' beliefs, Munby (1982) explains, is an understanding of which beliefs influence decisions teachers make to guide their practice. The multidimensionality of beliefs warrants the need to think in terms of connections among beliefs and not in terms of beliefs as independent subsystems (Bunting, 1984). In order to understand the context-specific nature of beliefs, it is essential to include teachers' verbal expressions and behaviours in investigations of their beliefs (Pajares, 1992). Munby (1982, 1984) and Schunk (1991) both suggest that qualitative methods such as case studies are required to gain such insights.

Using Kagan's (1992) construct, a better understanding of the distinction between knowledge and beliefs can be gained by examining the relationship between them as "inextricably intertwined" (Kagan, 1992, p. 325) and by viewing beliefs as a form of knowledge. This she refers to as "personal knowledge" (Kagan, 1992, p. 65) and asserts that "most of a teacher's professional knowledge can be regarded more accurately as a belief" (Kagan, 1992, p. 73). Beliefs, she continues to explain, are context dependent and related to a particular situation or circumstance (Kagan, 1992). For the purposes of this study, beliefs will be defined as implicit theories which teachers hold that represent personal knowledge.

Research evidence suggests that teachers from both sectors have varying beliefs, expectations and practices in the transition process (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006, 2010; Petriwskyj, 2005). Some findings reveal either a contradiction between what teachers believe

about communication between the two sectors and what is actually practised (Hopps, 2004), others discuss obstacles to optimal communication or participation (LaParo et al., 2003; Noel, 2010, 2011). Several studies have found that prior-to-school educators tend to participate in transition programs more often than Kindergarten teachers, implement more transition activities and share more documentation (Peters, 2000; Peters, Hartley, Rogers, Smith, & Carr, 2009; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Other research has identified that teachers in both sectors consider communication between the sectors is a valuable and worthwhile practice but they maintain it does not happen enough (Hopps, 2004; Noel, 2011). Poor communication between teachers in both sectors has been found to be a barrier to effective transitions for children (Chan, 2010; Einarsdottir, Perry & Dockett, 2008; Hopps, 2004; Margetts, 1999). Hence, international researchers continue to push for greater levels of communication and coordination between the numerous stakeholders involved in the transition process (Educational Transitions & Change (ETC) Research Group, 2011; Fabian, 2013; Hopps, 2004, 2014; Karila & Rantavuori, 2014; Rantavuori & Karila, 2015).

Beliefs that teachers have about ECEC and school can influence their understanding of these systems and so how they view the transition process. A key finding in the Sanders et al. (2005) study on the transition to formal schooling was that teachers expressed the most problematic challenge was the change from a play-based pedagogy in ECEC services to a more structured curriculum. School teachers' views about children's adjustment problems in their class may indicate a 'poor fit' between qualities of the classroom context and children's competencies (Hirst et al., 2011). In Dunlop's (2003) study on different perspectives of transition, it was found that the dissimilar ideologies between teachers from both sectors affected their views on capabilities of the same children. In order to bridge the qualitative differences between the two settings, recommendations include encouraging stronger communication and a shared understanding across prior-to-school and school staff, resulting in the development of point-of entry activities such as visits to schools and sharing of prior-to-school teachers' evaluation of a children transitioning to school (Broström, 2005; Cassidy, 2005; Kauerz, 2006). The

necessity for emphasis in terms of pedagogy and curricula, have been recommended but less comprehensively implemented and researched. Furthermore, there are few studies that focus on teacher beliefs or perspectives concerning play-based pedagogy (Fisher, Hirsch-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2008; Howard, 2010; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Tobin & Kurban, 2010), particularly across the transition process in the Australian context. Transitions are complex, and given the diversity of teachers and their varying pedagogical practices, they have differing beliefs and experiences of their roles in the facilitation of the transition process (Lickess, 2008; Peters, 2002) and this is important to explore. The findings of the current study contribute to this growing body of knowledge.

2.6   Pedagogy in early years settings

As the importance of high quality care and education has become more clearly understood in the early childhood sphere, so has the role of the educator or teacher within this. This, therefore, demands a strong comprehension of the meaning of pedagogy and how this unfolds in individual early years settings. A range of factors are involved in the development of pedagogy including evidence from research and theories, the expertise and experience of educators, political drivers, evidence from reflective practice, and community expectations. In addition, Alexander (1999, 2004) maintains that the macro-context factors such as school ethos, classroom design, school day and lesson structure are fundamental to notions of pedagogy. These factors are evident in curricular approaches such as *Te Whāriki* the New Zealand early childhood framework (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) and Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993).

Whilst the term 'pedagogy' has been situated in the European educational context for considerable time, the notions of pedagogy in Australia have only recently become part of our didactic vocabulary (Dockett et al., 2007). Furthermore, diverse perspectives on pedagogy exist in the research literature. Siraj-Blatchford (1999) discusses pedagogy as being associated with the micro-context as this is where learning and teaching occur. A later definition offered by Siraj-Blatchford,

Sylva, Muttock, Gilden and Bell (2002, p. 10) focused on the styles of interaction between teachers and children as being essential:

> the instructional techniques and strategies that allow learning to take place. It refers to the interactive process between teacher/practitioner and learner and it is also applied to include the provision of some aspects of the learning environment (including the concrete learning environment, and the actions of the family and community).

Alexander (2008) and Stephen (2010) explain that teachers express a reluctance to engage with pedagogical discussion and have difficulty articulating their chosen practices to support children's learning and this merits further investigation. In fact Stephen (2010) has referred to pedagogy as "the silent partner in early years learning" (p. 15). Drawing on the research of Moyles, Adams, and Musgrave (2002), she argues that "inhibitions about engaging in debate over pedagogy may hinder support for children's learning and may also limit professional growth of educators" (Stephen, 2010, p. 18). Moyles et al. (2002) maintain that teachers' unwillingness to engage in debate over pedagogy can impede support for children's learning as well as constrain professional development. Indeed, in the current study this proved to be a significant factor. Debates over pedagogy need to consider the various modes of constructing learning and the purpose of early years education. Alexander (2015) now provides a more contemporary definition describing it as "both the act of teaching and the ideas, values, knowledge and evidence that shape and justify it" (p. 253) adding that it is "what the teacher needs to know in order to make valid, effective and defensible classroom decisions" (p. 253).

However, such a perspective places the focus squarely on the teacher's role and aim in facilitating learning. The problem with such a perspective is that teaching may be conceptualised as distinct from the process of learning. The current study draws on the definition as expressed in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 11): "…pedagogy refers to the holistic nature of early childhood educators' professional practice (especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships),

curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning". This definition highlights a model of pedagogy that incorporates aspects of the teacher; classroom or other contexts; content, and the view of learning. In order to delve into teacher beliefs and theories about play-based pedagogy, it is first necessary to examine the literature base on definitions of play.

2.7 What is play?

Play has been recognised as a specific right for all children by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, in addition to and separate from a child's right to leisure and recreation (United Nations, 1989). The importance of play in the lives of young children has long been established over the centuries. Froebel (1782 –1852) and Pestalozzi (1746 –1827) identified the significance of play in children's development in the early 19th century (Goodine, 2010). These education pioneers highlighted play as a vehicle through which children can experiment and discover their surroundings and emphasised the importance of a stimulating, rich play environment for learning to occur. Their research and investigation laid the groundwork for further discussion and discourse about play's importance in child development. However, they struggled in their development of theoretical perspectives, as at the time, play was seen as frivolous and unnecessary. Studies continued over time to establish the importance of play, its benefits and the fundamental role of play in children's learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Miller & Almon, 2009; Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012; Wood & Attfield, 2005). According to a report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), play as a medium for learning is a core component of curriculum in successful early education settings (OECD, 2004, 2006, 2012).

While it is not the intent of this literature review to provide a comprehensive overview of all the significant theorists who have contributed to the extant literature on play, it is important to acknowledge some of the key origins that have shaped teacher ideas and theories presented in the current study. Teacher educators are

most probably strongly motivated and guided by what Ailwood (2003) refers to as the developmental discourse of play which has sprouted from research and theory of developmental psychology.

Two of the most influential theorists within this discourse who have shaped current understandings of children's learning and development are Piaget and Vygotsky. Piaget's (1962) cognitive constructivist theory emphasises the importance of young children actively constructing their knowledge about the real world through their own activities and considered play to be a major tool for facilitating children's mental development. The role of the teacher then was viewed as being passive or reactive; one of a facilitator or enabler. His stage-based theory described a characteristic type of play in each phase – with an emphasis on children having an active role in their learning, through first-hand experiences, both physically and mentally. Piaget (1962) argued that play can assist learning by promoting children to assimilate new information into existing cognitive structures (or schemas) and then move forward to new learning via the process of accommodation which involves changing or extending those cognitive structures. In this way, he believed that children's thinking proceeds from immature to mature, from simple to complex, and from concrete to abstract, with these stages being related to the idea of children's developmental readiness to progress to a new level. Vygotsky (1978), whose ideas centred on make-believe play, argued that it is the leading activity of young children and promotes development in the cognitive, emotional and social domains. Furthermore, he emphasised the social influence in how children learn – that cooperative dialogue with more knowledgeable adults and peers in play is required for children to develop ways of thinking and behaving in the culture of a community. In this path, he argued that play creates zones for proximal development (the difference between children's actual and potential developmental levels) and so children can move ahead in their current stage of development with this supported assistance. Hence, the adult's role is more proactive and complex, and involves guiding, supporting and extending children's learning. Therefore, what happens in early years educational settings in terms of teaching through play depends on which of these two perspectives teachers draw upon.

A clear definition of play in the research literature is elusive and indistinct because of its complexity, changing nature and its existence in diverse forms (Briggs & Hansen, 2012; Dockett & Fleer, 2002; Fleer, 2009; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2012; Fung & Cheng, 2012; Gordon, 2009; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009; Moyles, 2010a, 2015). Furthermore, achieving clarity is further hampered as play is context dependent (Brooker, 2011; Wood & Attfield, 2005; Wood, 2013) and contexts can be wide-ranging. Definitions vary among educators, theorists and researchers (Dockett & Fleer, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Moyles, 2015; Wood, 2009). Indeed, Ailwood (2003) writes "few authors writing about play would be brave enough to profess a final definition of play" (p. 288). Play operates as a wide-ranging term which encompasses an extensive scope of activities and behaviours. Play has been termed according to category, criteria and continuum groupings (Howard & McInnes, 2010). Sutton-Smith (1997) argues that almost anything can be termed as play. However, we must be wary - theoretical ambiguity in relation to the construct of play poses as one of the greatest challenges to implementing a play-based curriculum (Howard & McInnes, 2010).

Children's play has been defined as pleasurable, meaningful, intrinsically motivated, freely chosen, episodic, symbolic activity, non-literal, active engagement, and dependence on internal rather than external rules (Fromberg, 1992; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Moyles, 2015; Wood, 2009). Play also contributes to every facet of children's development: physical, social, personal, cognitive, creative, linguistic, moral and artistic (Saracho, 2012; Saracho & Spodek, 2006; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Such definitions provide an insight into the multifaceted nature of children's play. Play is also a foundation for Developmentally Appropriate Practice which positions play as a highly effective developmental activity (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Indeed Moyles (2015) suggests that it is best to view play as a process rather than to attempt to quantify its ephemeral nature. In an effort to limit interpretations of play, Pellegrini (1991) defends a more flexible approach to definitions that views children progressing along a continuum from pure play to non-play and so avoiding the play/work dichotomy.

However, some contest this idealised notion of play (Colliver, 2012), suggesting that many taken-for-granted ideas about play are acknowledged without challenge – such as ideas that play is "natural, normal, innocent, fun, solely about development and learning, beneficial to all children, and a universal right for children" (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010, p. 1). Other researchers agree that the influence of the dominant discourse of Euro-American theories and definitions do not address differences in children's social, cultural, economic, and political conditions (Brooker & Edwards, 2010; Rogers, 2011; Smith, 2010; Wood, 2013). In spite of this, it is important to note that these authors are not suggesting that play is not beneficial nor that it does not hold a significant place in children's lives or development.

2.7.1   *The relationship between play and learning*

Whilst a shared definition of play is a debated issue in early years education, the value of play has been widely endorsed (Dockett, 2011). In fact, in the seminal study by Bennett, Wood, and Rogers (1997), English reception class teachers revealed that they strongly valued play as a 'pedagogical priority' and expressed that they viewed play as "a vehicle for learning" (p. 33). Play's value as a medium for young children's learning is recognised and evident in the position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009, p. 4) which states: "Play is an important vehicle for the developing of self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and a social competence". It is evident throughout international early childhood curricula that there a similarities in the ways play is valued. Nevertheless, the relationship between play and learning in past research has been tenuous (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Wood & Attfield, 2005). The views educators hold of how children learn determine the circumstances in which that learning takes place and this influences how adults interact with children and support their learning (Trudell, 2010). Perhaps part of the problem lies in how learning is conceptualised, constrained by traditional notions of curriculum wherein subjects and learning are compartmentalised and separated by time and space (Briggs & Hansen, 2012) or

perhaps because play-based learning so differs from traditional linear learning. Furthermore, Ranz-Smith (2007) suggests that "fostering a sense of play in the learning process is perhaps a threat to adult perceptions of what school and learning ought to be" (p. 275).

Current literature strongly suggests that play and learning are intricately intertwined (Briggs & Hansen, 2012; Broadhead, 2010; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2010; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2008; Miller & Almon, 2009; Myck-Wayne, 2010; Pramling-Samuelsson & Fleer, 2009; Pramling-Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Roskos & Christie, 2011). However, conceptualising play-based pedagogy poses a challenge for educators (Wood, 2004; Wood, 2009; Wood, 2010a). Indeed, whilst many early years practitioners espouse that children learn through play, and regard it as essential to children's learning and development, few can sufficiently articulate that tenet with in-depth knowledge or move beyond references to developmental domains (Dockett, 2011; Moyles, 2010b; Wood & Attfield, 2005). It is important that educators are able to articulate 'why' they provide a play-based approach so that they are able to validate it to others.

Wood (2010a, 2010b) reasons that mixing play and pedagogy, or constructing the link between play and learning "has always been problematic" (Wood, 2010a, p. 12) because teachers either view both as separate or they employ mixed rather than integrated pedagogies. Mixed approaches tend to feature adult-led activities, leaving play on the perimeter of practice (Wood, 2010a). She proposes that this association can be viewed through two lenses: outside-in and inside-out. The outside-in outlook stems from the cultural transmission/directive orientation or the 'what play does for children' focus. The inside-out perspective derives from the emergent/responsive approach or the 'what play means for children'. Wood (2010a) argues that problems develop when the former standpoint overshadows the latter, and that the inside-out position should inform integrated pedagogical approaches to avoid the play-learn dichotomy. What is beneficial, states McInnes et al. (2011), is that educators not only establish a pedagogy based on a strong understanding of the relationship between play and learning but also the educator's role in

facilitating play and learning. Dockett (2011) concurs proposing that a focus on teaching through play is a comparatively current notion, given that traditional conceptualisations of the role of the educator promote that of being an observer or facilitator. In fact, Hyvonen (2011) asserts that "new insight is required to relate teachers' pedagogical knowledge to play-based teaching - something which is currently limited" (p. 67) and to move beyond viewing play merely as having social relevance. A fundamental element to this understanding is deliberation of teachers' theories of play and how this impacts on their practice – indeed, this is a key consideration in the current study. A key challenge in developing a pedagogy of play is crafting unity between play, learning and teaching (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Nevertheless, Hedges (2010) explains succinctly that "the adage of learning through play has never sat comfortably alongside the notion of teaching through play, and is unlikely ever to do so" (p. 25).

2.7.2   Conceptualising a pedagogy of play

In early childhood education, play has long been recognised as a valued pedagogy (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2008; Kennedy & Barblett, 2010; Miller & Almon, 2009; Moyles, 2010a; Piaget, 1962; Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund-Carlsson, 2008; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Historically, play-based learning has been associated with the notion of child-centred pedagogy (Edwards & Cutter-McKenzie, 2011; Ryan, 2005). Chung and Walsh (2000) explain that while the term child-centredness may seem self-explanatory, their extensive investigation uncovered up to 40 different interpretations of this concept in the field of early childhood contemporary literature. These meanings included a scope from learning based on children's interests, to children's participation in decisions related to their learning, to an emphasis on developmental strategies, to the development of the individual potential (Chung & Walsh, 2000).

Recently, there has been increased debate from post-developmental perspectives about the notion of child-centred play informing the early childhood curriculum (Edwards & Cutter-McKenzie, 2011, Wood, 2010b). Emerging research highlights the significance of teacher interactions and guidance during children's

play (Fleer, 2010; Martlew, Stephen, & Ellis 2011; Pramling-Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Ryan & Goffin, 2008; Weisberg, Zosh, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013) and the teacher's role in planning for learning in play-based experiences (Gibbons, 2007; Gronlund, 2010; Howard, 2010). Such perspectives challenge the traditionally held notion of child-centred play where children are encouraged to develop their own understandings and learning through open-ended and essentially self-directed play.

Synodi (2010) claims that for teachers to truly consider they employ a pedagogy of play, the three approaches of child-initiated or child-directed play, teacher-directed play and mutually directed play of both teachers and children need to be provided. Child-directed play means that children are allowed to play without direct interference from the teacher (Gmitrova, Podhajecká, & Gmitrov, 2009). Children play freely and have power and control over it. Teachers' involvement may include the role of organiser, stage manager, observer, listener and assessor (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Teacher-directed or teacher-organised play (Wood & Attfield, 2005) involves games or playful activities that are prepared by teachers to be used as teaching opportunities. Such play is employed to assist children to consolidate and practice what has been taught and the teacher's role is one of a tutor (Gmitrova et al., 2009). Teachers set the rules of play and hold the power of control of the play. Mutually-directed play occurs when teachers engage in children's free play in a non-disruptive manner, respecting children's intentions and being involved on their terms (Goouch, 2008). Their role may include a co-player, mediator and scribe (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Both the teacher and the child share the power in play. Similarly, Ashiabi (2007), and Howard and McInnes (2010) – discuss the need for a balance of child-initiated and teacher-guided experiences. Teachers' beliefs and perceptions of these three approaches determine whether they become a part of a pedagogy of play.

Dockett and Fleer (2002) explain that the teacher's role in children's play can be viewed as a continuum from indirect planning for play to a direct engagement in the play. At the indirect end of this continuum, teachers assume the role of manager

where they organise time, space and resources to support play. When teachers adopt a more involved role in the middle of this continuum, they become facilitators, mediators and interpreters of the play that occurs. It is here where the roles of mediating and interpreting are closely linked to promoting equity in children's play that address issues of gender, power and inclusivity. Direct involvement is attained when teachers occupy more directive and active roles such as co-players or play tutors with the aim of developing complex play. Control of the play at this end of the continuum is more likely with the teacher than with the children (Dockett & Fleer, 2002).

A pedagogy of play, therefore, signifies that teachers act as co-players, mediators, scribes, tutors, observers, assessors, planners and organisers (Ashiabi, 2007; Jones & Reynolds 1992; Wood & Attfield, 2005). The value that adults attribute to play, and the role they have in play, influences the type and quality of play that children experience (Goodine, 2010, Wood, 2004). Play is most valuable as a vehicle for learning when teachers are actively involved (Smilansky, 1990; Wood, 2004; Wood & Attfield, 2005). The importance of teachers learning how to play with children intentionally and responsively so that play is enhanced or expanded is also noted by Howard (2010) and Lobman (2005). This contrasts interactions that only involve provision of materials or making suggestions to start the play. Wood (2010a) argues that in order to promote learning through play there are four equally complimentary and valid pedagogic roles: engaging playfully with learners; modelling play and playful behaviours; observing and reflecting on play; and becoming a play partner. Teachers who have strong knowledge of the value of play provide 'good-fit' interactions with children during play and are able to link play with learning outcomes (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). These studies provide important implications for teachers using play-based pedagogy. It is important to consider teachers' perspectives and beliefs about play as their beliefs influence their actions (Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Konig, 2012; Pajares, 1992) and this was a driving force for the current study.

The juxtaposition of play with pedagogy is problematic; particularly as the notion of play is often situated in opposition to its more highly regarded counterpart, work (Broadhead, 2010; Fung & Cheng, 2012; Hyvonen, 2011; McInnes et al., 2011; Rogers, 2011; Walsh, Taylor, Sproule, & McGuinness, 2008; Yelland, 2011). This separation may "prevent the integration of play into pedagogical practice" (Rogers, 2011, p. 5). Furthermore, historically the play-work tension becomes more distinct during the transition to formal schooling stage (O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012), and as Wood and Attfield (2005) explain, as children navigate the passage through transition "the boundaries between work and play become increasingly evident in primary school" (p. 16).

A valid question is proposed by Lim (2010): where, in an educational society that regards academic achievement over children's holistic development, how might teachers reach a middle ground within the dichotomy of play and work? It is fundamental that teachers embrace both in the learning environment as complimentary and essential. Spodek and Saracho (2003) argue that it is unnecessary to evaluate activities as either play or work and that a dichotomous play-work approach can limit teaching and learning possibilities (Cooney, Gupton, & O'Laughlin, 2000). Instead, Howard and McInnes (2010) and Wood (2010a) suggest teachers should utilise an integrated approach of both child-initiated and teacher-directed activities where teachers plan for play with the children, based on their interactions and observations. Teaching and learning become co-constructive and relational processes emphasising dynamic interactions between people, resources and experiences in the learning context.

While children's play is valued by many teachers, often they are uncertain of how to guide that play to achieve more educational value (Moyles et al., 2002; Saracho & Spodek, 1998; Wood, 2004). The educational outcomes of play may be limited when there is a lack of intervention or interaction. Children require assistance to make sense of their discoveries and to be able to connect new knowledge with existing understandings so that cognitive advances result. Wood and Bennett (1997, 1999) have critically analysed the role of play, more specifically

play as pedagogy, and found that teachers were often unsure of their role in children's play. Debates centred on when to intervene in children's play and when to leave them to play alone. This represents a general shift in the literature from the more developmental, Piagetian focus of children's learning ('ages and stages') to a Vygotskian notion of adult's role in scaffolding and co-constructing with children. Such theoretical debates highlight the significance of these issues in teachers' practices.

According to Hujala, Helenius, and Hyvonen (2010), learning through play focuses the contextual orientation of children's development and comprises three characteristics: children as active meaning makers; learning as a cooperational process; and environments as active participants in playing and learning. Perhaps part of the problem is in how school teachers conceptualise learning. Learning is traditionally viewed as a structured activity where the locus of control lies with the teacher (Briggs & Hansen, 2012). Additionally, the problem is also that many teachers view play and learning as dichotomous concepts, particularly those in schools. They find it challenging to integrate the two in their thinking and practice (Hujala et al., 2010; Hyvonen, 2011). Teachers in schools are bound by notions of curriculum which derive from "the separation of subjects and learning into compartments" (Briggs & Hansen, 2012, p. 3). The school system seems to predominantly drive children's learning toward essential skill and knowledge development that will assist them to pass assessments and tests. Herein lies what Briggs and Hansen (2012) refer to as "the planning paradox" (p. 9); how do teachers in schools, with a focus on accountability and assessment procedures, find a balance in providing child-centred play-like experiences that do not shift all the control of what is learned away from the teacher and over to the students? If current research is so clear on the value of play as a legitimate pedagogy, it is important to understand why opposing views persist. Thus, there is a need to relate teachers' pedagogical knowledge to play-based teaching so that new insight can be gained. Thus, their views about how they implement play at the grassroots level are essential to this study.

2.8 Barriers to play

A significant body of research on play in early childhood settings (Brooker, 2011; Martlew, Stephen, & Ellis, 2011; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010) discusses a consistent theme, that being; "the tensions between the rhetoric and reality create one of the main challenges for practitioners" (Wood, 2013, p. 14). Indeed, this was a significant impetus for the current study. Early years teachers struggle to find a balance between personal theories and beliefs about play and constraining elements that challenge its implementation. Kagan (1990) identified 3 types of barriers to the implementation of play that are frequently cited: attitudinal, structural and functional. Attitudinal obstacles were noted as those associated with teachers' perceptions of play and how they value play (Brooker, 2010; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Lynch, 2015; Moyles, 2010b). Furthermore, beliefs about play practice are deeply associated with training and theoretical knowledge as found by McMullen and Alat (2002).

Structural barriers describe those related to the structure of the learning environment such as time, space, resources, and curricula, and these have been noted in research (Fung & Cheng, 2012; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Howard, 2010; Quance, Lehrer, & Stathopoulos, 2008; Sandberg & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2003). Indeed, Ranz-Smith's (2007) study revealed that curricular expectations in the first years of school have been cited by teachers as a barrier to the inclusion of play in the process of learning. The author highlights that teachers are "engaged in a precarious balancing act as they strive to meet increasing curriculum requirements while remaining responsive to children and their play" (p. 272). Furthermore, the author maintains that "there have emerged defined curricula cultivating the practice of direct instruction as the efficient means to achieve the goals, to the neglect of children's propensity for play-based learning and child-initiated thought" (p. 272). Similarly, Howard's (2010) research identified the influence of curricular pressures on teachers' classroom practice and points out that "understanding play through the lens of the curriculum appears to be constraining, rather than supporting early years practice" (p. 100). Roskos and Neuman (2011) cite issues

around space and access to resources within the learning environment as fundamental considerations which impact on children's learning and social interactions that occur within it.

Finally, functional aspects which are related to contextual elements that impact on teacher provisions for play define the functional elements and these are closely associated with attitudinal barriers (Kagan, 1990). Such elements relate to attitudes or beliefs of others such as parents and considerable research has indicated that parents tend to value academic learning and progress over play, particularly as a measure of children's success in the transitioning process (Barbarin, Early, Clifford, Bryant, Frome, Burchinal, Howes, & Pianta, 2008; Dockett, 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2004; Graue, 2009; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Moyles, 2010b; Niesel & Griebel, 2001; O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012; Tobin & Kurban 2010). Barbarin et al. (2008) note that parents tend to align their beliefs with policymakers more so than with teachers. Also, principals and other staff in schools may also assign less value to play as children progress upwards through the grades (Fung & Cheng, 2012; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009). Additionally, each school context differs together with its respective challenges for implementing play. Whilst preservice teaching programs provide theoretical and practical preparation, this alone may not be adequate to empower teachers to feel secure in implementing play-based pedagogy in school contexts (McInnes et al., 2011). Functional constraints also include top-down pressures of accountability, assessments and high-stakes testing (Graue, 2009; Lynch, 2015; Miller & Almon, 2009; Nicolopoulou, 2010). Kindergarten teachers have reported being caught between their developmentally appropriate beliefs and requests from administrators, parents and other teachers to improve academic standards (Goldstein, 2007). Such tensions contribute to play-based pedagogy being minimised in Kindergarten classrooms and an increase in more academically oriented teaching.

2.9 The demise of play, the overcrowded curriculum and 'schoolification' pressures

Currently around the globe, with the advent of rigorous accountability, there has been a major shift in how early years education is conceptualised and implemented (Bassok, Latham, Rorem, 2016; Graue, 2009; Lynch, 2015; Miller & Almon, 2009), signalling a paradigm shift in how early childhood standards, curricula, assessment are viewed (Fleer, 2011a). This has marked a change from recognising the uniqueness of every child and his/her interests (individualising learning) to standards becoming universalised and pre-specified. This swings the starting point of educational pedagogy from the child to the content. Pressure from school readiness concerns (OECD, 2006; Nicolopoulou, 2010) and a lack of understanding about the role play holds in children's learning (Martlew, Stephen, & Ellis, 2011) threatens to completely displace play in the school curriculum. Coupled with the misinterpretation of 'high quality' early childhood programs, societal anxieties about the perception that children are lagging in their academic achievements in later school years has led to pressure for a focus on developing academic skills at a younger age (Bassok et al., 2016; Bodrova, 2008; Curwood, 2007; Miller & Almon, 2009). Many Kindergarten classrooms are strongly focused on teaching these academics skills with prior-to-school settings following closely behind (Miller & Almon, 2009). The pressure to produce 'school ready' children in prior-to-school settings has also been termed as 'schoolification' defined by Doherty (2007, p. 7) as:

> an emphasis on the acquisition of specific pre-academic skills and knowledge transfer by the adult rather than a focus on broad development[al] goals such as social-emotional well-being and the gaining of understanding and knowledge by the child through direct experience and experimentation.

However, Bodrova (2008) asserts that such attention on early academic skill building proves to be ineffective over time, and can in fact be detrimental to children's future social and emotional development. Additionally, in light of

increasing demands for a greater focus on academic abilities for young children, the absence of an agreed definition of play contributes to challenges in advocating for a place for play-based pedagogy both in early childhood settings and in the school curriculum (Bodrova & Leong, 2010; Pyle & Bigelow, 2015).

The related changed educational climate in the United States of America and Australia has brought greater pressure of more accountability (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009; Jay, Knaus, & Hesterman, 2014; McGregor, 2010). The term "accountability shovedown" (Hatch, 2002, p. 462) has been ascribed to this increased focus on accountability. High stakes assessment practices and an academically driven push-down curriculum have affected prior-to-school settings placing a greater focus in preparing children for school and early years schooling concentrating on academic content (Curwood, 2007; Einarsdottir, 2006; Fleer, 2011b; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Jay et al., 2014; Johnson & Dinger, 2012; Marxen, Ofstedal, & Danbom, 2008; Pianta, 2007). Such a focus impacts on perceptions of appropriate curriculum and pedagogical practices not only in early childhood services but also in the first years of school (Bassok et al., 2016; Pappano, 2010; Russell, 2011; Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2003). As a result, in many early years settings now, young children sit for long periods of time engaged in practice and drill-like activities or worksheets with an academic emphasis, within learning environments that focus on didactic teaching at the expense of play-based approaches (Curwood, 2007; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Johnson & Dinger, 2012; Luke, 2010; McGregor, 2010; O'Kane, 2007).

Indeed, in a 2014 review of the *Australian Curriculum* by the Department of Education, school principals and teachers together reported their concerns about overcrowding in the new curriculum adding that "the content being excessive, unduly rigid and prescriptive in many of the learning areas" (Australian Government Department of Education, 2014, p. 6). This is further supported by similar concerns from the Alliance for High Quality Education in the Early Years of Schooling *Discussion Paper* (2014) and the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA, 2014). As Grieshaber (2009) notes, overly prescriptive curricula and

accountability procedures, particularly in terms of mounting pressure for schools to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes, do not yield high quality schooling. Instead she advocates that, particularly in relation to smoothing the transition to school, "having greater similarity between the syllabi and curricula of the pre-compulsory and the compulsory years reduces the challenges children face when making this transition" (p. 10). Furthermore, O'Connell (2012) maintains that what is also needed is a major shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning environments.

As a result of this early learning shift, families and educators are questioning how a play-based pedagogy and curriculum prepares children adequately for a different educational environment (Dockett, 2011; Fleer, 2011b). In fact, in the United States of America, play-based learning is being squeezed out of the curriculum (Bassok et al., 2016; Ginsberg, 2007; Graue, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009; Myck-Wayne, 2010; Wohlend & Peppler, 2015). In a report from the Alliance for Childhood described by Harris, Golinkoff, and Hirsh-Pasek (2011), 30 per cent of American teachers teaching in the first year of formal schooling claimed that they cannot find time for child-chosen activities or play experiences. Most teachers in Australian ECEC settings are willing to help prepare children for their new role, but within the context of play-based learning. This, therefore, demands teachers to be able to clearly articulate how learning and teaching can be achieved through play.

Early childhood teachers relate of the pressure to focus more strongly on academic skills from Kindergarten teachers who, in turn, describe feeling pressured from upper primary teachers to narrow curriculum to a limited range of subjects (Jay, Knaus & Hesterman, 2014; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Wesley & Buysee, 2003). In some cases, this is considered as a means of aligning standards across the two contexts (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005). Other researchers view this route as detrimental to early childhood perspectives of child-centred, play-based curricula, resulting in additional push-down of academic curriculum (Jay et al., 2014; Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2003) and 'schoolification' concerns (Ackesjö, 2013b; Alcock & Haggerty, 2013; Grieshaber, 2009; Gunnarsdottir, 2014; Moss, 2013;

OECD, 2006). What is essential to consider is the need to maintain high quality ECEC services, and educators who can confidently articulate the value of a play-based pedagogy and its role in preparing children for the transition to school. Key in this is the ability to convey and demonstrate how play-based learning is used to assist children to achieve higher cognitive functioning and outcomes.

2.10   Pursuing continuity in the transition process

There is a strong research base on the transition to school that emphasises the importance of continuity between the settings (Ackesjö, 2013b; Connor, 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2014; Dockett, Perry, Campbell, Hard, Kearney, & Taffe, 2007; Dunlop, 2013; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002; Einarsdottir, 2006, 2013; Fabian, 2013; Geiser, Horwitz, & Gerstein, 2013; Mayfield, 2003) and continuity in children's education has also been highlighted by the OECD (2006, 2011). Many of these studies couch continuity in terms of jointly constructed transition activities, reciprocal communication and relationships, and developing strong linkages and strategic partnerships between prior-to-school and school settings (Ashton et al., 2008; Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014; Chan, 2010; Collie et al., 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Henderson, 2014; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008, Noel, 2011; OECD, 2006). Building on children's funds of knowledge or prior learning experiences as a means to promote continuity is a key suggestion in the literature (Brooker, 2008; DEECD, 2009; O'Kane, 2015; Peters, 2010) highlighting the role educational settings play in supporting individual children. Also, the sharing of information and understandings about children's learning between teachers in these services has also been highlighted as significant to supporting continuity (Dockett et al., 2007; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; Niesel & Griebel, 2007; Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011). However, in relation to sharing of information between the two contexts, teachers have experienced constraints in undertaking this effectively due in part to professional misunderstandings, knowledge-power relations and working in isolation to one another (Cassidy, 2005; Hopps, 2004; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006).

According to Mayfield (2003) continuity is "an on-going *process*, and not a series of isolated events" (p. 239, italics in original) and can be defined as how, and to what degree, one program links to and builds on another for the value of the children. Lam and Pollard (2006) state that continuity refers to the compatibility of two settings in which there is a continuous experience. Such definitions therefore, highlight that where children experience inconsistency and unfamiliarity, discontinuity exists. Hence, continuity of experience can smooth children's transitions (Dockett & Perry, 2014). In the research literature, the notion of continuity that is discussed is more complex than just upholding familiarity across settings. Continuity in transition is focused on teachers building an understanding of what was before so as to promote continued progress (Connor, 2011; Noel, 2011; Peters, 2010). Otherwise, as Wood and Caulier-Grice (2006) advise, some of the benefit of early childhood education may be lessened during later years if it is not built on progressively. They add that "it is sustaining these gains through primary school years which will have the most impact on their adult life chances" (p. 19).

Mayfield (2003) outlines six forms of continuity: philosophical, curricular, developmental, physical, organizational, and administrative continuities. Similarly, Fabian (2002a) discusses three varieties of discontinuities that children experience in the transition to school and summarises these as physical, social and philosophical. Broström (2013) has extended on these to include two additional levels; communication discontinuity and discontinuity in children's views of preschool and school. Philosophical continuity encompasses pedagogical beliefs and approaches as well as teaching practices, such as the balance between work and play, and it is this form that the present study will address.

Recent transition literature suggests that a key element that has emerged in effective transitions for children is the notion of pedagogic continuity (Bredekamp, 2010; Broström, 2013; Dockett et al., 2007; Dunlop, 2013; Harrison, 2015; Li et al., 2011; Monkeviciene, Mishara, & Dufour, 2006; Neuman, 2002, 2007; Petriwskyj et al., 2005, 2013; Smith, 2015; Smith & Maher, 2016 in press; Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013). Pedagogic continuity across transition processes requires collaborative

partnerships between teachers in both sectors of education and should avoid the notion of 'schoolification' (Moss, 2013; Neuman, 2007). As Bredekamp (2010) points out pedagogical continuity requires more "coherence and connectedness" (p. 135) in terms of curriculum and teaching practices. Planning for pedagogic continuity involves consideration of continuity of teaching and learning, and the shared understanding of effective pedagogy required to ensure children's transitions are successful. This necessitates collaboration, discourse, bi-directional interaction, and the supportive partnerships (Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Noel, 2011; O'Kane, 2015) between teachers and administrators across both sectors of education to build strong pedagogical connections. It is useful here to reflect on what Britt and Sumsion (2003) designate as "'the space between'… a valid space, a site of connection, of intersection, of overlap… a space not only of existence, but of coexistence" (p. 133). Both Bennett (2013) and Moss (2013) reaffirm and extend on the recommendations from the OECD's *Starting Strong* reports (OECD, 2001, 2006) of a 'strong and equal partnership' and suggest teachers in both sectors reflect on Dahlberg and Lenz-Taguchi's (1994) idea of the creation of a meeting place where teachers can mutually rework their pedagogical practices. In this way, the transition to school can be considered a shared space or "a shared borderland" (Britt & Sumsion, 2003, p. 134) with points of intersection, cohabitation and negotiation so that teachers can shift into new relational spaces (Henderson, 2014; Moss, 2013).

Ready schools need to show a commitment to pedagogic continuity through creating pedagogical meeting places and shared pedagogical approaches across the transition process (Kelman & Lauchlan, 2010). Indeed, O'Kane (2015) reminds us that international research has argued time and again for play-based approaches in both prior-to-school and early years school contexts and that such an approach in the early years of school would facilitate smoother transitions for children. The use of play-based pedagogy in the early years of school would enable new learning experiences to be introduced to children in more recognisable, familiar and developmentally appropriate modes. To support the place of play-based pedagogy in children's transition to formal schooling, it is essential to understand what

teachers in both sectors believe about the value of play as a vehicle for learning and teaching, and their role to support it.

2.11   Alignment of curricula and pedagogies

Communication and partnerships between prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers can provide a valuable link in ensuring more continuity and consistency between the two environments, particularly in reference to curricula and pedagogical practices (Neuman, 2007). As Bredekamp (2010) remarks, the "abrupt shift in instructional practices" (p. 144) is a particular challenging aspect that children experience during the transition process. There is little justification for the change in teaching methods given that children's learning styles do not vary between completing early childhood education and starting school. Thus, there is a strong basis for pursuing greater alignment between the curricula and pedagogy in the two settings. Therefore, Bredekamp (2010) proposes that a crucial measure towards achieving pedagogical continuity and providing smoother transitions for children would be to align preschool and K-3 (Kindergarten to year 3) teaching practices. Furthermore, alignment of preschool and kindergarten curricula has been identified as a vehicle by which to improve the continuity between settings and reduce challenges experienced by children, and so, supporting their transition (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; CCCH, 2008; Fabian, 2002b, 2013; Grieshaber, 2009; Kauerz, 2006; O'Kane, 2015). Additionally, curricular alignment and continuity has a substantial influence on quality, as in the Nordic countries where the effort is to avoid 'schoolification' issues that arise with readiness concerns, and instead early childhood pedagogy is favoured to shape the foundation of early primary education (OECD, 2006).

Alignment can take two forms, horizontal and vertical alignment. Horizontal alignment denotes the alignment of curricula, standards and assessment within a given age cohort, while vertical alignment refers to that between age cohorts (Kagan & Kauerz, 2007). Vertical alignment of curricula implies that comparisons of curriculum documents between the two sectors involve a level of

consistency or continuity in subject content and developmental domains. An example would be prior-to-school standards are aligned with Kindergarten school standards (Kauerz, 2006). When this alignment is strong, curricula complement and build on one another. Globally, in recent years, there has been increased interest in the connections made between ECEC and school settings (Connor, 2012). Until recently, the focus on transition activities and structural connections has primarily addressed certain elements of vertical alignment between ECEC settings and Kindergarten. These include visits to a Kindergarten school classroom or administrative organisation between transition programs. However, one-off transitions events are insufficient. Full vertical alignment implies the continuous and progressive quality of children's learning and development and should include content and pedagogical strategies (Kauerz, 2006). Teachers who are informed and knowledgeable about the developmental characteristics of children aged three to eight years recognise the significance of including developmentally appropriate practices into their teaching (Geiser, Horwitz, & Gertein, 2013). The incorporation of learning-oriented guided play in the early years of formal schooling could promote and improve continuity between the different contexts (Broström, 2005; Walker, 2007). In this way, the learning and skills that are formed in one context function not as an end point, but as foundational skills upon which to build further knowledge in future learning.

With regard to maintaining the positive outcomes and impact of high quality ECEC settings, and avoid a fade-out effect of these, Kauerz (2006) suggests having well-aligned programs commencing in prior-to-school settings and extending through to the Year Three of school. This, she contends, is a crucial element for improving the quality of early years education. Petriwskyj et al. (2013) add that such alignment "provides a context for gradual change" (p. 20). Thus, stronger alignment between the two contexts can be achieved by forming a common curriculum framework across ECEC services and schools. Examples in the Australian context include curriculum documents in the states of Victoria and South Australia. The *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* (Department of Education & Training, 2016) originally introduced in 2009 and

revised in 2016, takes into account the full age-range from birth to eight years and provides clear information about the transition to school, including ongoing links to later school education. Similarly, the *South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework* (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2001) was designed to support continuity of learning from birth to Year 12. These documents provide a shared, common language and guiding principles for teachers in both sectors of education, and therefore promote continuity in pedagogy and practice. At present, no such documents exist in NSW. In order to scaffold improved pedagogic continuity and curricular alignment between the ECEC and schools, policy revision is required.

2.12   Examining the EYLF and Australian Curriculum

If effective and seamless transitions are to be realised, it is essential to understand and articulate the connections between the *EYLF* and the *Australian Curriculum* for schools. In order to support children's transitions from prior-to-school settings to Kindergarten to promote continuity of pedagogy, the promotion of integration and alignment of the two sectors is necessary.

Both documents highlight the importance of children's learning however each reflects a varied focus on that learning. They serve different purposes and signify the unique nature of each of the two educational environments. The *EYLF* embodies a holistic, child-centred approach to young children's learning attained through play-based intentional pedagogies, where curriculum is co-constructed and realised through broad learning outcomes. In contrast, the *Australian Curriculum* is driven by content and proficiency standards with detailed content descriptions (Perry, Dockett, & Harley, 2012). This places weight on the subjects being taught and what is important for children to know, with content being prescribed and predetermined whilst placing little or no importance on the active participation of students in their own learning or recognition of their prior learning.

Connections between the two documents reveal that there exists "continuity at the policy level" (Grieshaber & Shearer, 2013, p. 16) and they are based on the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Both are underpinned by the belief in the transformational capacity of education. The holistic General Capabilities in the *Australian Curriculum* are described as complimenting the key learning outcomes of the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009) and are explained as "…the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that, together with curriculum content in each learning area and the cross-curriculum priorities, will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century" (ACARA, 2012b, p. 3). Comparison of the two highlights a focus on building on the outcomes of the *EYLF* and that effective learning foundations have been established to prepare children for their continuing education in primary school. However, in the *Australian Curriculum* the transition to school has minimal consideration and so "it is difficult to see evidence of alignment in advice for teachers and educators" (Grieshaber & Shearer, 2013, p. 17) that could translate into pedagogical practice.

When examined together, the *EYLF* and the *Australian Curriculum* do not seem to facilitate and exhibit a strong continuity of learning and pedagogy. In the *Australian Curriculum* it notes that teachers in schools can choose which pedagogical approaches to implement whilst the *EYLF* advocates for play-based learning and intentional teaching for educators in ECEC settings. Also, enactment of the *Australian Curriculum* means that learning is subject based in schools with prescribed specific content whereas holistic broad learning outcomes within the *EYLF* guide content in ECEC settings. Potential discontinuity and confusion can arise when areas such as learning, content, pedagogy differ significantly between the two. Teachers in both sectors who facilitate the transition process will need to build a mutual understanding to develop a shared meaning of appropriate pedagogic continuity. Having both documents available at this point in time affords the possibility for shared dialogue between teachers working in ECEC and school settings. Teachers involved in this process need to understand that they are working to a common goal of pedagogic continuity. When considering the transition to school, as Perry, Dockett, and Harley (2012) stress, it is essential that teachers ensure

"that young children are not disadvantaged as a result of their learning inspired by the EYLF" (p. 171). Effective transitions and continuity in children's learning is assured when the efforts of prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers are pedagogical in orientation. It is important that prior-to-school settings and schools plan for transitions that provide cohesion and continuity across both sectors of education for early years schooling. Prior-to-school educators need to draw on the *Australian Curriculum* to lay the groundwork for future learning while Kindergarten teachers need to familiarise themselves with the *EYLF* for early childhood pedagogical advice. In an era of increased accountability and high expectations of early years education, teachers, families, policy makers and the general public need to have a greater understanding of the need for pedagogical alignment between the two sectors within the transition process.

A review of the literature revealed the complex nature of the transition to school process and some of the tensions that exist for teachers in relation to pedagogy and facilitating effective transitions. The relationship between play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity has not been sufficiently explored in the Australian context and studies have centred on issues of either play-based pedagogy or pedagogic continuity within the transition process separately. Hence, the present study seeks to address this gap by using the discourse of play-based pedagogy with teachers in both sectors of education together with the notion of pedagogic continuity so that they can richly describe their perspectives. The following chapter discusses the methodology used that guided the study and the rationale for the methods chosen to answer the research questions derived from the literature review.

2.13   Summary

This chapter critically reviewed and examined the literature relating to the topic of this study and highlighted the complex and diverse nature of the transition to school. This analysis has drawn attention to the many factors which contribute to transition being a multifaceted phenomenon and has also illustrated the importance

of the need to ensure that this process is effective and successful for children. A key emerging element in the extant literature base that has been identified in shaping this success is the continuity in pedagogy, particularly the idea of using the discourse of play as a valued pedagogy to promote such continuity. However, barriers arise as a result of differing understandings and perspectives of play, play-based and early years pedagogy and also the use of different curriculum documents in the two sectors. Thus, instead of transitions being seamless, discontinuities exist. The issue of pedagogic continuity in transitions is one that necessitates further attention from policy makers, schools, families and particularly the teachers who manage and enact this process. This literature stresses that establishing such continuity involves moving beyond notions of school readiness to a focus on bridging the pedagogical gap between prior-to-school and school settings. Whilst much research has been carried out on the transition to school, few studies have focused on teacher beliefs and the association between play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity across this transition process, particularly in the Australian context. This study addressed this gap to explore the perspectives of teachers across the pedagogical divide. The next chapter addresses the methodological framework and outlines the design for the current study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

"Research is one of many different ways of knowing or understanding. It is different from other ways of knowing, such as insight, divine inspiration, and acceptance of authoritative dictates, in that it is a process of systematic inquiry that is designed to collect, analyze, interpret, and use data"

(Mertens, 2015, p.2)

Introduction

This chapter outlines the considerations taken into account when selecting a methodology and the methods that would elicit the most relevant data to answer the research questions in this study and structure a coherent research design. When designing a research study, it is important for the researcher to be conscious of the frameworks used and the assumptions upon which they are based. Within this section I discuss research design, including philosophical assumptions, the methods, the sample, the pilot process, and data collection and analysis. Trustworthiness and authenticity are addressed, as well as ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and data protection.

In Chapter One, the overarching research question and three subsidiary questions were posed in order to frame the study. At this juncture it would seem appropriate to restate these questions to illuminate how each one contributed to the inquiry of whether the use of play-based pedagogy is a significant factor in promoting pedagogic continuity for successful transitions for children to formal schooling.

The three subsidiary questions which guided this research study were:

1.   How do prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based learning and teaching?

2.   What do prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?

3.   What factors influence prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers' decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?

These questions played a pivotal function in providing focus and structure to the research inquiry and also in binding this study together to guide the formulation of research tools and data analysis to satisfy the purpose of the study as stated in Chapter One.

3.1   Research Design

3.1.1   Choosing a theoretical paradigm

When engaging in systematic inquiry, or "doing research" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 1), it is important to choose a research design that fits with your worldview and to understand the underlying philosophical foundations. Creswell (2013) discusses the importance for researchers to make explicit the basic belief system or "alternative knowledge claims" (p. 20) they bring to their inquiry together with accompanying philosophical assumptions that are embedded within interpretive frameworks, as these inform and guide the research process. This perspective or worldview is considered as the theoretical paradigm and the four philosophical assumptions include beliefs about ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2015). Based on this notion, the constructivism paradigm was chosen for the current study because the focus was on subjective meanings and the complexity of the multiple constructed beliefs grounded in the lived experiences of the teacher participants. Additionally, from a constructivist perspective, a research study is recognised as an undertaking in not merely the discovery, but the construction, of knowledge. Thus, the goal of this research was to "understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge" (Mertens, 2015, p. 18). I first have considered my ontological beliefs followed by the epistemological, axiological and methodological elements that will frame the study. These are intricately related and act on one another in research design planning and implementation.   Figure 3.1 shows the interconnected

hierarchical relationship between the assumptions examined and provides a broad guide for the design of the research and a frame for the flow of the discussion in this chapter.
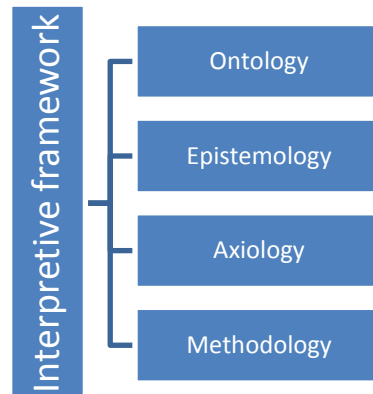
Figure 3.1   Interpretive framework for the current study

This research sought to go beyond procedural issues of transition programs and concerns around starting age of school entry which are administrative and policy matters. My intent was to collect extensive detail to deepen understanding about whether the use of play-based pedagogy to promote continuity of learning and teaching was a key feature for teachers in the transition process. As an early childhood educator, it was also important for me to choose an approach that best fitted with my ontological and epistemological views on teaching and young children's learning. I view teaching and learning as developing meaning through personal interactions and experiences. It is a process of close co-construction and collaboration interwoven with the understanding of multiple perspectives, thus a constructed, subjective reality (Sarantakos, 2013).

The purpose was to explore and uncover teachers' beliefs about the value of using play-based pedagogy to promote pedagogic continuity across the transition process which relies heavily on intent and meaning. I believe it is important to discuss with teachers their beliefs and practices, particularly as beliefs strongly influence teacher practices (see 2.5). This creation of reality was an interactive process and the interpretations of their views were "constructions of the

constructed reality of the respondents" (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 38). My role as a researcher was one of an active participant; an up-close investigator involved in the meaning-making process of the interpretations of diverse realities.

3.1.2   Ontological assumptions

Hence, this research adopted an interpretivist's ontology, in which reality was socially constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and understood from the perspectives and experiences of the research participants (Creswell, 2013), in this case prior-to-school and Kindergarten teachers. Such inquiry is value-laden, recognises that reality is not absolute and embodies the notion of multiple realities that are "time and context dependent" (Mertens, 2015, p. 237). Thus, knowledge was not 'found' but constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a researcher, I had to work within the premise that participants' knowledge and meanings were formed socially; to listen, describe, explain and reconstruct their personal realities. It is understood then that the phenomenon of pedagogic continuity across the transition process means different things to each of the participants in the study.

My intention was to explore the research question in a way that would facilitate the participants to impart deep, personal individual views (Creswell, 2013). In this way, I was able to report on these multiple realities and present the participants' different perspectives using their voice. As Denzin and Lincoln (2013) describe, this is like a crystallisation process within which the researcher is able to "tell the same tale from different points of view" (p. 10). I believe that such an interpretivist's perspective affords a more detailed representation which enhances a greater understanding of the research questions. Thus, the resulting case study report does not present a "definitive capture of a reality" (Mertens, 2015, p. 19) but instead is my rendition of the multiple constructed realities of the teacher participants.

3.1.3   Epistemological assumptions

Carter and Little (2007) view epistemology as the "justification of knowledge" (p. 1317) and explain that decisions about epistemology have bearing

on the choice of methodology and methods. They add that epistemology influences the relationship between the researcher and the participant. Accordingly, the epistemological assumption in this study therefore is subjectivist whereby "subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views. This is how knowledge is known – through the subjective experiences of people" (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Thus, my epistemological view is that the participants are actively involved and together with the researcher co-construct the subjective reality that is being studied. This is a transactional process, interactively linked in that the researcher's questions and comments influence that participants' involvement, while the participants' responses influence the meaning and interpretation that is attributed by the researcher (Mertens, 2015). Conducting research in the field then becomes a crucial element as it is context sensitive (Sarantakos, 2013). In order to better understand what the participants reveal, it is essential that the researcher engages with them where they live and work (Creswell, 2013). This is so that the "distance" or "objective separateness" (Guba & Lincoln cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 20) is diminished between the researcher and the participants. I considered it important to engage with teachers about their beliefs and views and so employed a more personal and interactive approach to the collection of data. If transition practices are shaped by teachers' beliefs, the deep exploration of those beliefs is beneficial to develop a complex, comprehensive understanding of the topic which was achieved through using qualitative case study methodology. Through this study, I sought to talk directly with teachers in prior to school and school settings to enable them to freely tell their stories unconstrained by what I might expect to find. In this way, my epistemological decisions contributed to an internally consistent design and my epistemological perspective justified the knowledge produced in this research, as shown in Figure 3.2.
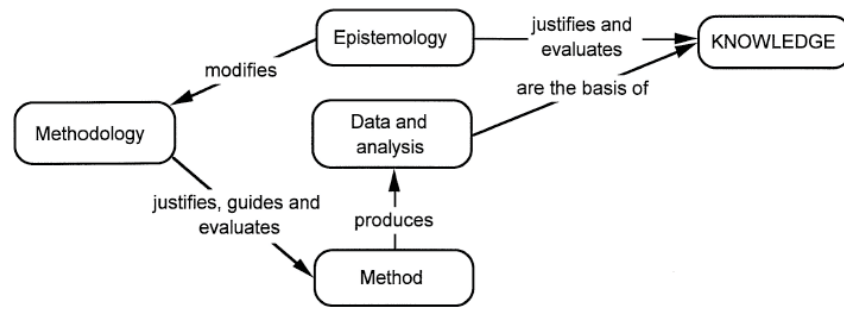
Figure 3.2   The relationship between epistemology, methodology and method (from Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1317)

3.1.4   Axiological assumptions

On an axiological level, recognition of the researcher's values is an essential component of the research process and should be acknowledged and described. Carter and Little (2007) explain that epistemology "has ethical weight" (p. 1322) and that axiology relates to epistemology in two respects: it is in epistemology itself as epistemology holds values and also in the broader cultural context that informs epistemology. In Chapter One (1.3) I have made my underlying assumptions explicit and also outlined how my life experiences and beliefs have influenced the topic of this study. My identity as a teacher and researcher, along with my values and beliefs, all contributed to how the data were collected and interpreted. As much as possible I have separated my personal experiences from the information gathered, but my relationship within the educational community will have had an influence on the nature of the information gained. To partially overcome this bias, teachers' words have been used to describe and reflect on their practice wherever possible. Thus I believe the value-laden nature of the study was addressed and biases reported. Additionally, as it is in the interaction between the researcher and researched that knowledge is created, I acknowledge that the decisions made throughout the different phases of this research have inevitably influenced the findings of this study. The discussion, evaluation and justification of the knowledge generated in this study have been in relation to comparing the values of the

research participants to my own values and those of the broader culture which have been informed by the research topic.

3.2   Qualitative study

Creswell (2013) explains that qualitative study is appropriate when a problem or issue requires exploration. According to Maxwell (2012) qualitative research designs are proposed to characterise "what is actually taking place, not simply what the researcher plans or intends" (p. 71). Qualitative inquiry is particularly valuable when a complex, detailed understanding of the topic is required (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, as Patton (2015) expresses "qualitative data describe…tell a story" (p. 54) and so such research is interpretive, defining and redefining the meanings of what has been seen and heard (Stake, 2010). The focus is on making meaning of the lived experiences of those being researched in specific settings (Neuman, 2011) and communicating their experiences of the world in their own words (Patton, 2015) . This can only be ascertained by talking directly with the participants, visiting them in their place of work or homes and empowering them to impart their stories. Qualitative research strives to be naturalistic and non-interventionist (Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995) and so the setting is important in such inquiry. The term 'naturalistic' implies that the research is conducted in a natural setting at a site where participants actually experience the issue under investigation (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Furthermore, qualitative research is beneficial when it is necessary to understand the contexts in which those being researched address an issue (Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2011). Context is central to this study, as the quality of children's transitions experiences are greatly affected by the settings in which the teachers work.

Qualitative inquiry is especially effective for studies that involve a small number of people and in generating "a feeling for the whole, for grasping subtle shades of meaning" (Neuman, 2000, p. 124). Capturing the uniqueness of nuanced beliefs leading to actions of individuals in a study is best understood where dialogue and collaboration take place and the researcher can delve deeper with

subsequent participants on interesting aspects highlighted by one participant. The use of a qualitative research design allowed for the conduct of research to occur within a natural setting in order to provide rich, 'thick' descriptions (Patton, 2015; Sarantakos, 2013; Stake, 2010) from the perspectives of teachers. A substantial investigation of the practices and beliefs of the participants afforded the identification of patterns and themes which contributed to enriching the study's data findings. Moreover, I believe that their constructed, multiple realities cannot be examined in pieces, but require a holistic approach. This current study fulfils such descriptions. At the most fundamental level, the purpose of my research was about improving the *quality* of the transition process. To make judgements about quality, insight into what people value and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences, requires qualitative inquiry that is in-depth and holistic (Patton, 2015).

3.3   Case study methodology

As this study was examining the phenomenon from the perspective of two different groups of research participants, an exploratory case study approach was employed (Yin, 2014). The author defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 16). Such inquiry is particularly suited to the study of detailed workings of relationships and processes within a setting as they tend to be interconnected (Denscombe, 2010). Flyvbjerg (2006) explains that an advantage of the case study " is that it can "close in" on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice" (p. 235). Case study research aims to explore and depict an authentic, natural setting with the purpose of expanding an understanding of it (Cousin, 2005). It presents "a rich description and details of the lived experiences of specific cases or individuals and offers an understanding of how these individuals perceive the various phenomena in the social world and their effect on themselves" (Basit, 2010, p. 21).

The choice of a case study provided the benefit of a familiar topic i.e. transitions, that could be viewed afresh as a result of robust examination. My research question necessitated understanding the how and why of teachers' beliefs. For example, how strongly do they feel about their beliefs about play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity, and why do teachers feel the way they do about their pedagogical practices. Employing a multiple-case design (Yin, 2014) allowed for the similarities and differences between the two cases to be clearly documented and brought to the forefront, revealing unique and common qualities of each case that would otherwise go unnoticed in a single case study (Stake, 1995). This case study comprised of two phases. The first was a 'within-case analysis' that provided a detailed description of each case and the second phase involved a 'cross-case analysis' where the similarities and differences were highlighted and discussed. As the aim was to provide narrative accounts and insight into teachers' transition experiences, this process yielded rich, thick descriptions of the participants' beliefs. This allowed for intricate details to become more visible and captured the complexity of their perceptions. In this way, I was able to portray the participants' lived experiences of the transition to school and their thoughts about, and feelings for, this process. Furthermore, a case study approach was chosen as most appropriate for this study because it was flexible in design and the focus was on subjectivity - exploring the meanings, experiences and views of participants, which were dependent on context. Additionally, it provided the opportunity to weigh their different versions of reality and allowed participants to tell their stories and describe their version of reality. This in turn allowed me to better understand the participants' actions. This is important because it ensured that the research question was not explored through one lens, but rather a range of lenses which allowed for multiple aspects of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood.

Case study is "the study of an instance in action" (Adelman et al., cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 289) or a particular instance of a type of social phenomenon (Denscombe, 2010; Mertens, 2015) such as the transition to school process. This instance can then also help to illuminate other similar phenomena or cases, and is "intended to demonstrate a more general notion of the social world"

(Basit, 2010, p. 21). Furthermore, case study looks at particularisation (Stake, 1995) with the emphasis on uniqueness and understanding (MacNaughton, Rolfe, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). Thus, a defining characteristic of this approach is that the aim is to "illuminate the general by looking at the particular" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 53). These generalisations are not statistical but lend themselves to naturalistic, analytical generalisations that help other researchers to understand similar situations or cases (Basit, 2010). Therefore, my study helps to illuminate significant elements of transition processes to assist teachers in both sectors of education when planning and implementing this journey for young children.

3.4 Data collection methods

Methods can be regarded as research action or "the practical activities of research" (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1318) and they produce knowledge. Methodology and epistemology become visible through the methods. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain, data collection techniques are determined by "the researcher's theoretical orientation, the problem and the purpose of the study, and by the sample collected" (p. 106). This study employed the use of both "*researcher-generated* and *already existing* data" (Rapley, 2007, p. 8, italics in original); these were in-depth interviews and document-based sources as they were considered the most valuable and effective methods in order to "uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 106) into the overarching research question. Pre-structuring the methods helped contain the amount of data that needed to be analysed (Maxwell, 2012). These methods in combination helped to reduce the probability of collection of homogeneous data, ensured enough sources of understanding and ways of looking at the transition process, and created a rich and strong data set. The use of multiple sources of data allowed the researcher to triangulate the data collected and strengthened rigour of the findings (Cohen et al., 2011). The use of cross-case examination and within-case examination together with the literature review assisted to establish trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013).

3.4.1   The in-depth interview

The most important data collecting techniques for this study were considered to be in-depth interviews as they are well-suited to "the exploration of more complex and subtle phenomena" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 173). This afforded the possibility to contribute different perspectives teachers held about the transition process. Hence, I wanted to give voice to their beliefs about play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity because it is these teachers who enact the transition process. Semi-structured interviews were chosen from a constructivist's point of view because they fitted with the stated purpose (Cohen et al., 2011) and allowed the researcher to access a special form of information. Thus, it was possible to obtain knowledge of, and gain insight into, things that cannot be directly observed such as "feeling, thoughts, and intentions…behaviours that took place at some previous point in time" (Patton cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108). It was important that I depicted an in-depth view of such beliefs; this moves away from the conception of viewing human participants as manipulable data (Cohen et al., 2011). To achieve such insights it was considered important that data be gathered in a manner which would be least likely to pre-empt or in any way limit the scope of the participants' responses. With semi-structured interviews, participants were able to develop ideas and talk more broadly on issues broached (Denscombe, 2010). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allowed for the researcher to respond more freely to the topic of the moment and "to the emerging worldview of the respondent" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111).

In-depth individual interviews were chosen because they enabled the teachers to provide a rich, narrative account of their experiences and for the researcher to access significant data (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Such interviews offer opportunities to probe further, clarify meaning or correct misunderstanding, and obtain more detailed and relevant information (Sarantakos, 2013; Yin, 2014). This makes it easier for the researcher to "locate specific ideas with specific people" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 176). One-to-one interviews permitted more freedom to explore beyond the questions and spontaneously guide discussion (Patton, 2015).

The medium of face-to-face dialogue provided opportunities for me to discover how strongly each respondent personally felt about the chosen subject area (Gay et al., 2012). This was noted in facial expressions and particular displays of body language unable to be observed in purely written responses.

Cohen et al. (2011) observe that a key principle of case study research is to state the time and place in which the data are collected as the events studied are context-specific. The Kindergarten teacher interview schedule occurred within Term 2 of the 2013 NSW school year (May-June) so that the transition process remained at the forefront of recent experiences for these teachers. Prior-to-school educators were interviewed at the end of the 2013 school year (October-December) when preparation for children transitioning to school was a key focus. Interviews were conducted on site, in a private location, within the grounds of the schools or preschools and arranged at a time convenient for the participants. This was either within teaching hours (during relief from face-to-face teaching) or immediately after the school/preschool session ended. This arrangement was essential to ensure that the teacher-participants were comfortable, at ease and were in an environment that was conducive for them to speak openly and frankly. Each teacher was interviewed once and all interviews were performed face-to-face and ranged in duration from 50-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transferred to a secure desktop computer file.

Before the interviews commenced, participants were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and reminded that they could withdraw from the interview process at any time without prejudice. In order to create an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect and cooperation, interviews sessions commenced by initiating casual conversation about background information and whether they had any professional development in the area of the transition to school. Furthermore, I assumed what Patton (2015) names as "empathic neutrality grounded in mindfulness" (p. 60) to build rapport and openness so my understanding of participants' perspectives was without judgement and I was focused and attentive during each session. Throughout the interviews, I also ensured that I spent time

clarifying their views by rephrasing or repeating their comments back to them to confirm accuracy of meaning (Silverman, 2005). I also took field notes throughout each interview to highlight key words or phrases that participants used that would assist me when using probes. Elaboration and clarification probes were used to elicit a deeper response and encourage further detail (Patton, 2015). The participants appeared to enjoy the opportunity to be able to share their beliefs, talk about their work and reflect on their roles across the transition process. This time was characterised by stories about classroom experiences that illuminated their views and a mutual respect of children's learning, by laughter, and in their reflective pauses and positive comments about being challenged to think deeper about their practice.

3.4.2   *The interview questions*

Because the focus of this study was about the beliefs of teachers, it was important to develop interview questions that would elicit individual views and which captured their unique perspectives and afforded them the opportunity to talk and think deeply and reflectively. Following a review of the literature on the pedagogy of play and pedagogic continuity, my research and interview questions emerged. The three subsidiary research questions were the guiding force of my study and so the interview questions had to be devised to allow a comprehensive answer to each question. They were carefully constructed to elicit reflective, detailed responses from the participants and to promote comfortable conversation. It was essential to begin with questions that were clear to the participant and with those that would elicit the relevant information desired (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A mixture of question types were formulated following Patton's (2015 cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) suggested guide in order to encourage responses from participants. These included a combination of: background, knowledge, values and opinions, experience, and feeling questions.

In order to guide the interview process, a semi-structured interview protocol of 12 questions, with themes for discussion (see Appendix 2) was designed specifically for this study. This guide provided topics that offered the freedom to

explore and probe the participants' responses and in this way, establish a conversational style that encompassed a central focus around each topic. Broad themes covered the following areas: the pedagogy of play, the roles of teachers in play, pedagogic continuity, and obstacles or factors impeding the implementation of play. As time was a constraining factor for each teacher within the confines of a busy work day, the interview guide ensured the best use of the limited time available (Patton, 2015).

Patton (2015) suggests that the sequence and framing of interview questions is important to consider. Placing less threatening and easier questions earlier in the interview ensures participants feel more at ease. Following this advice, I ensured that the 'what' or knowledge questions preceded the more searching 'how' or 'why' questions throughout the interview guide. 'What' questions encourage more descriptive dialogue and tend to require less interpretation and recall (Patton cited in Merriam, 2009). This then facilitates ease of soliciting those questions that exact feelings and opinions. The use of open-ended questions allowed the respondents to freely answer in their own way, using their own words so that "the research is responsive to participants' own frames of reference and response" (Cohen at al., 2011, p. 413). Such questions also allowed flexibility in how they were answered, maintained the individuality of responses and opened up the possibility of unforeseen or unexpected answers. In this way, I was able to understand their perspectives without predetermining their points of view.

3.4.3   Pilot Study

In case study research, Yin (2014) recommends a pilot test to refine plans for data collection and to form a relevant line of questions. In order to test the feasibility of the interview questions, prior to commencement of data collection, a pilot study was conducted among academic colleagues at the university where the researcher was employed, as well as among teachers from nearby preschools and schools. All held either early childhood or primary qualifications and had experience working with children in the relevant age groupings of the study. My key focus was on obtaining evaluative feedback about language clarity and to

determine if the interview questions were appropriate to the purpose of the study. It was important that the imminent study's participants understood each of the questions in the same way in order to assist data coding and remove the possibility of uncertainty (Silverman, 2005). The pilot participants were emailed the 12 interview questions and written responses were then returned for assessment. The outcome of the pilot study required amendments to be made to certain questions. In particular, question 5 which read "What is your understanding of pedagogic continuity?" was revised to state "What is your understanding of pedagogic continuity (the continuity of teaching and learning) across the transition process?" Teachers in the pilot study revealed that the term 'pedagogic continuity' was unfamiliar or unclear to them and so required further clarification. I felt that it was important to also include the context term of 'across the transition process' at the end to help foreground the term's relevance to the question.

3.4.4   Member checking

Member checking is a practice whereby "the data, analyses, interpretations and conclusions" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252), rather than raw data or transcripts, are taken back to the participants to offer them "an opportunity to provide context and an alternative interpretation" (Patton cited in Loh, 2013, p. 6). Respondent validation ensures that the researcher solicits systematic feedback from the participants on the interpretation of the data (Cohen et al., 2011). Indeed, according to Stake (cited in Creswell, 2013), a key role performed by the research participants should also be directing in addition to acting in case study research. Each participant in this study was given the opportunity to review his/her summarised transcript, together with significant quotes, as well as the identified conceptual categories and themes to provide comments or revisions and ensure that their intended meanings were captured accurately (Denscombe, 2010; Stake, 2010). The option to comment on the summarised interviews helped to avoid bias that might have arisen from my interpretation of each teacher's comments. This opportunity for participants to give feedback was a key manner of establishing the reliability of the data gathered and helped to counter researcher bias. No revisions or corrections

were offered and participants were satisfied with the accuracy of the summarised transcripts and identified categories and related themes. Participants will be given access to the results of the study (at the completion of the research process as noted in the Plain Language Statement that was supplied to teachers (see Appendix 3).

3.4.5   *Information from document-based sources*

Documents and websites were used a secondary source of data collection and were what McCulloch (2004) refers to as those "produced without any direct involvement on the part of the researcher, produced for other purposes and often with different priorities from those of the researcher" (p. 2). In this way, documents provide an advantage in their stability and, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) offer, they are 'objective' or 'unobtrusive' - unaffected by the research process where the presence of the researcher has not altered what is being studied as in other forms of data collection procedures. In most instances, documents exist prior to the commencement of research and are useful in that they can advance new categories in the analysis phases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Also, as Rapley (2007) explains, documents work towards engaging the reader "into a specific way of knowing, acting and being in and understanding the world" (p. 123). Thus, document-based sources included analysis of the key curriculum and transition documents used in the different education sectors, together with related websites and publications that provide information on the transition to school, with a focus on pedagogy. Primary documents in the form of public records (McCulloch, 2004; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rapley, 2007) such as the national curricula documents, the new NSW transition statement, and related websites were selected because they have an impact on practice across the transition process. Websites and online documents (post-2009) that related to the transition to school were chosen as they were constructed after the EYLF was developed and initiated. Also, these were readily accessible and available in the public domain (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rapley, 2007). Lastly, these were considered to be illuminating to the current topic of investigation and were able to be integrated into the process of inductively building categories.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that authenticity and accuracy of the selected documents need to be established in order to identify the author, the place and date of writing. The key documents chosen in the present study were all official educational publications developed within the last seven years and authored by national and state governmental agencies. These were:

- *Belonging, Being and Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (*EYLF)* (DEEWR, 2009)

- the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2015)

- *Foundations for Learning: Relationships between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum- An ECA-ACARA Paper* (Connor, 2012)

- *The NSW Transition to School Statement (*NSW DEC, 2014*)*

- *The NSW Transition to School Statement – Information sheet for early childhood educators* (NSW DEC, 2014)

- *The NSW Transition to School Statement – Information sheet for school teachers* (NSW DEC, 2014).

Such documents are useful to "discover and map specific discourses" (Rapley, 2007, p. 13) or as McCulloch (2004) explains "documents are social and historical constructs" (p. 5) and those selected for the study highlight the contemporary dimensions of Australian social and educational policy and climate. Once authenticity and accuracy have been determined, a system of coding needs to be developed in order to analyse their content, which in this study was in alignment with the coding procedure in the interviews.

3.4.6   Sampling strategy

Creswell (2013) suggests that in order to strengthen a qualitative study, decisions need to be reached about sampling in terms of who or what, the type of sampling, and the number of people or sites required to be sampled. In qualitative sampling, the objective is to deepen understanding or provide clarity about complex events, issues or relationships in the social world (Neuman, 2011). Patton

(2015) explains that "qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples…selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth" (p. 52). As the guiding notion in this study was not to warrant representativeness or comparability, but instead to identify participants that best inform the research questions under exploration, purposive sampling was employed (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) contends that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of specific cases: *information-rich cases*. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful sampling* " (p. 53, italics in original). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) purposive sampling highlights a criterion based selection of information-rich cases which provides the researcher with opportunities to discover, understand and achieve more insight on significant issues for the study. Hence, it is essential to first determine the selection criteria that will "directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 97). Furthermore, the authors emphasise the importance of also explaining why the criteria are significant in addition to outlining their specifications.

3.4.7   *Case study sites*

Preschools and primary schools in which teachers work with children involved in the transition process provided a bounded context for the current case study. Four separate preschools and four government primary schools were selected within the Sydney region as the primary research sites. These were chosen as they were readily accessible thus the selection was limited and did not include sites in rural or remote. Each was chosen to represent diversity in terms of being either a high or low SES, or high or low EAL location so as to better understand the processes and "local contextual influences" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 94) for these specific settings. Two of the highest risk factors affecting children's adjustment to school are socio-economic status and English as an Additional Language. Thus, these aspects were foregrounded in the selection of the research sites. Preschools were chosen

because 55% of 4-5 year old children in NSW attend such services (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a) and government primary schools were selected as 65% of Kindergarten aged children attend this sector of education in NSW (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b). The choice of focus on the transition to school process was central to this research because it is the critical point in the pedagogic divide and the Kindergarten Foundation year would be the initial link to familiar play experiences that children first experience between the two contexts.

3.4.8   *The research participants*

For this study, it was essential to select a sample from which the most meaning could be realised and was uniquely suited to the intent of the inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) propose sampling until a point of saturation or redundancy is reached.   "In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus *redundancy* is the primary criterion" (p. 101, italics in original). The participants in the study were eight practising teachers within the Sydney region. In keeping with case study research, it was important to purposively select practising educators as they were experiencing the phenomenon under study. Whilst teachers do not hold complete control over transitions, they are critical players and contributors who implement the process, and so were the key participants of the current study.

The use of convenience purposive sampling allowed for the selection of the two "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2015, p. 53) in order better illuminate my research questions under investigation. Four teachers were considered for each case study at the beginning of the inquiry and had data saturation not been reached there was flexibility to extend the number of participants in each case. The two case studies were; Case Study One – comprised of four prior-to-school teachers (early childhood teachers in preschools to include those from one high and one low SES prior-to-school setting, and one high and one low EAL prior-to-school setting); and

Case Study Two – comprised of four Kindergarten teachers (primary teachers in public schools to include those from one high and one low SES primary school setting, and one high and one low EAL primary school setting). Figure 3.3 illustrates the case study design that was developed and used for the current study.
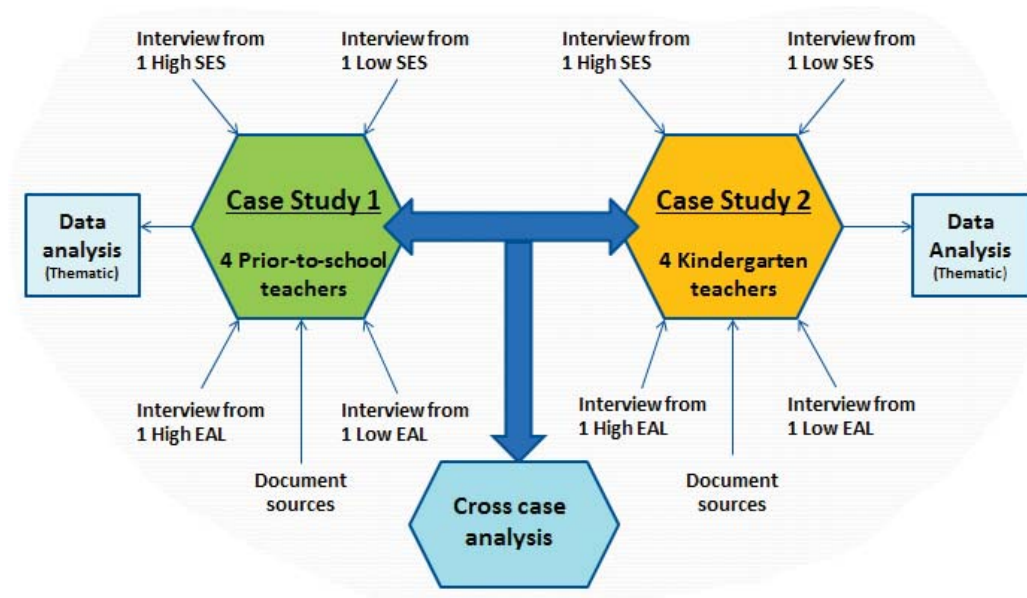
Figure 3.3   Case study design for the current study

3.4.9   Recruitment procedures

Following approval from the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee in December 2012 (Reference No. 012101S), permission was sought and gained from the NSW Department of Education and Communities (formerly DET) in early 2013 to recruit Kindergarten teachers in government schools (SERAP No. 2013069). Approval to conduct research was also obtained from KU (Kindergarten Union) Children's Services in order to interview some of their preschool teachers. Preschool directors and school principals were individually contacted by phone or email and invited to participate in the study. Those principals and directors who agreed to take part were sent information letters that explained the research study in more detail. These services were asked to select one teacher who was suitable, willing and available to participate in the study. All

principals and directors were assured that participants' anonymity was paramount and that pseudonyms would be used.

The eight teacher participants were recruited based on the criteria I had specified for the study and as was explained in the information letter emailed to the principals and directors. Prior-to-school teachers were defined as university trained, and had a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience working with children aged four-five years old (i.e. those of the age who were transitioning to formal schooling) and whose settings had implemented the *EYLF* for at least two years. Kindergarten teachers were defined as university trained (or equivalent) with a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience working with children in the Kindergarten (Foundation) year. Tertiary trained teachers with Bachelor degrees were chosen in accordance with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and for early childhood teachers as specified by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). Novice and experienced teacher-participants were invited in order to expand coverage of different perspectives brought to the study. Each teacher was invited to participate through a personalised emailed letter of invitation (see Appendices 4 & 5). This described the purpose of the study and what their participation entailed, including the voluntary nature of the study and the procedures for maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. They also received an informed consent form (see Appendix 6) which addressed ethical issues. The interested participants were asked to either phone or email if they were willing to participate so that an interview date could be negotiated and scheduled once consent forms were signed. Informed consent was obtained from the teachers after discussions with them about the research either by phone or email.

3.4.10 Participant demographics

The range of overall teaching experience was from four to 40 years. Various qualifications and positions were held by the teacher participants. Of the eight participants, two teachers held Masters qualifications, two were teaching directors and two were assistant principals. None had completed any professional development in the area of the transition to school. Table 3.1 shows the

demographic information of the eight participants interviewed for the study including years of teaching, qualifications, the type of service and demographic of service. Pseudonym codes were used to ensure confidentiality.

Table 3.1   *Demographic information of teacher participants in the study*

Participant code	Years of teaching	Qualification	Type of service	Service Demographic
PT1	20yrs	Bachelor of Education	Primary school	High SES
PT2	14yrs	Bachelor of Arts, Diploma of Education, Master of Arts	Primary school	Low EAL
PT3	14yrs	Diploma of Children's Services, Bachelor of Early Childhood Education	Primary school	Low SES
PT4	7yrs	Bachelor of General Studies, Bachelor of Teaching	Primary school	High EAL
EC1	23yrs	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)	Preschool	High EAL
EC2	4yrs	Bachelor of Education (Birth-12)	Preschool	Low SES
EC3	2yrs	Diploma of Children's Services, Bachelor of Education	Preschool	Low EAL
EC4	40yrs	Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, Masters of Adult Education	Preschool	High SES

3.5   Ethical considerations

Consideration of ethical issues is essential in the qualitative research process (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2011). The individual researcher has "a moral and professional obligation to be ethical even when research participants are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics" (Neuman, 2011, p. 143). My personal moral code and conscience together with a strong understanding and commitment to ethical research guided my actions throughout the current study. Ethical conduct and sensitivity was maintained by being aware of my responsibilities as a researcher to ensure participant consent, confidentiality and protecting individual anonymity (Creswell, 2013). Informed consent of participants is a fundamental principle of social research and participants require sufficient information about the

study to make a reasoned judgement about their choice to participate (Denscombe, 2010). Each participant was provided with an informed consent form that clearly outlined essential ethical principles including participant rights. Confidentiality and privacy are important aspects in any research, particularly when working with human participants (Cohen et al., 2011). Participants were ensured that their identity would be kept anonymous. All collated data was non-identifiable and participant codes were used to ensure privacy. It was explained that all information collected would be used for the purpose of this research study only and potentially for publication in peer reviewed academic journals. Additionally, all recordings and transcripts were used strictly by me and kept in a safe and secure location. At the completion of the study, the data would be destroyed according to the university's policy on ethical conduct in human research. In order to uphold integrity, I adhered to relevant interview protocol and remained acutely aware of issues of power and my responsibility "to guide, protect, and oversee the interests of the people" (Neuman, 2011, p. 144) involved in the study.

3.6 Data analysis

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) data analysis is "the process of making sense out of the data" (p. 202) and discovering the answer to the key research question of the study in the form of categories, themes or findings. In relation to case study research, Stake (1995) refers to analysis as taking apart our impressions and adds "each researcher needs, through experience and reflection, to find the forms of analysis that work for him or her" (Stake, 1995, p. 77). In this study, the purpose of data analysis was to interpret, understand and then be able to describe the participants' constructed beliefs of play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity across the transition to formal schooling. Data collection and analysis in qualitative inquiry is commonly a simultaneous process, thus the two are merged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sarantakos, 2013). Analysis of data involves consolidation, reduction and interpretation of what the participants said and what the researcher has read. It is an intricate, spiralling progression of moving

backwards and forwards between tangible data and abstract concepts, between reasoning that is inductive and deductive, and between description and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.6.1   Thematic analysis

In this study, thematic analysis was used to identify and describe concepts, themes and repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006) across the participants' descriptions of their perceptions and experiences of the transition process as well as within the online document. In relation to the document-based sources, thematic analysis was utilised to highlight both what was identified and included, and what was missing - "the silences, gaps or omissions" (Rapley, 2007, p. 111). Braun and Clarke (2006) point out the thematic analysis can be applied within different theoretical frameworks and "can be used to do different things within them" (p. 81). They explain that thematic analysis can impart a more nuanced or detailed account of a group of themes within the data related to specific research questions. The six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), as shown in Table 3.2, guided my analysis progression and were used flexibly where deemed appropriate. Initially, data sets were analysed independently and then combined for the case report in Chapter Four so that a holistic and synthesised coverage of the findings could be presented in relation to the three research questions.

Table 3.2   Phases of thematic analysis (from Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

3.6.2   Analysis phases to develop significant concepts and themes

Some basic data analysis began before all the data had been collected as during the interviews I frequently noted initial ideas and also interpreted and analysed the participants' responses to decide on the probing questions. Phase 1 began after all the interviews had been completed, and analysis of data commenced with verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews completed by a professional transcriptionist. The next step involved repeated readings of each interview transcript whilst listening and reviewing the recording to check for and correct any errors. This provided the opportunity for deep attending and active engagement with the research material at this early stage whilst also bringing awareness to my impact on the data gathering process and to connect with the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A broad-brush perusal of raw data was completed to gain some general meaning and to begin identifying segments in the data set that were responsive to the study's research questions. In this way I became familiar with the data and was able to record initial ideas about interesting aspects of the data. Continuous re-reading of each interview provided descriptive analysis using a recursive process and also facilitated a thorough familiarity with each participant's perspective.

During phase 2, in order for initial coding to be generated, the reduction of the data through editing, segmenting and summarising was an essential aspect. As the central focus of this study was the understanding of teacher beliefs in the two settings and what continuities exist between them, I decided to analyse by each case first – the within-case analysis – and then progressed to the cross-case analysis, with the intention to describe experience and meaning. Following the re-reading stage, data exploration and reduction began which was a synergistic process. Relevant sections of text within each individual transcript were highlighted in different colours according to each research question for ease of identification. Each section of text was examined and divided into meaningful groups (Braun & Clarke,

2006). These were transferred into summary tables for each subsidiary research question, organised according to the corresponding interview questions, to show responses within each case. Thus, each interview was individually summarised and the constructed summary tables assisted with data reduction. This construction provided a composite synopsis which captured the collective nature of the participants' statements, as well as safeguarding the cohesion of the combined experiences of the participants.

Using an inductive approach, data were coded without the aim of fitting into a pre-existing coding frame or any analytic preconceptions. Potential coding schemes were developed according to repeated topics and ideas through an on-going interactive process that involved continual thought and reflection. I ensured that I remained open to the possibility of coding for as many potential patterns or themes as were possible, knowing that later some could be rejected. As responses were grouped, I sifted and sorted these as I looked for similarities and differences among them in order to collate data relevant to each code, together with developing patterns and emerging themes.

Phase 3 involved searching for themes. The different codes were then sorted and collapsed to develop potential themes and the relevant coded extracts were collated within identified themes. Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) explanation of what counts as a theme, I ensured that identification of key ideas captured "something important in relation to the overall research question" (p. 81). Thus, the thematic analysis was data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, a latent or interpretive level approach was employed for theme identification that went beyond semantic content of the data and complemented the epistemological viewpoint of this study whereby meaning and experience are socially produced. Some initial codes went on to shape main themes whilst others were discarded. Possible significant concepts and themes were identified within these units according to their different elements and these were colour coded to assist with identification. It was as this point that the construction of thematic coding tables for each case was useful to depict the emerging themes for each research question as I

considered how the different codes could be combined to develop overarching concepts. The assembling of tables assisted with clustering of concepts and provided a broader overview of the theme piles which would later form the collective narrative.

Reviewing the themes with the purpose of refining them comprised phase 4 of the analysis process. It became evident that some themes were not in fact themes as there was insufficient data to support them, whilst others were collapsed into each other to create one theme. An important consideration at this point was that "data within themes should cohere together meaningfully" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). Two levels of review were involved to confirm this: the first was the review at the coded extracts level to ensure that the data excerpts within the themes configured to a coherent pattern; and the second was in relation to considering the validity of individual themes to the entire data set. Creating a thematic map in relation to themes within each research question for the respective case studies, with the aim to producing a final overall thematic map, was an essential activity to check the cogency of the two review levels. Early thematic models for each case and relating to each research question, such as the example in Figure 3.4, were created to support the conceptualisation of elements and ideas that clustered together. Once I felt I had generated a satisfactory thematic map overview of the data I moved on the next phase of analysis.
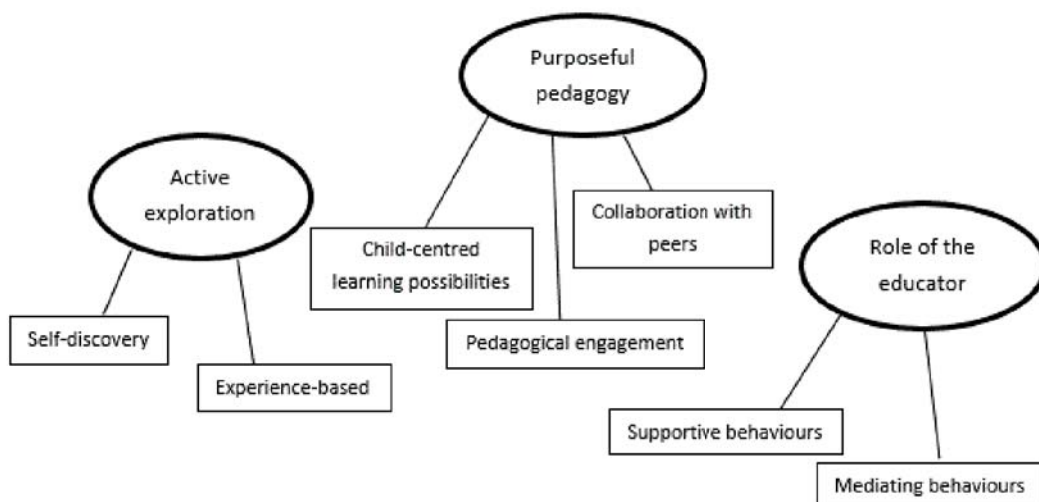
Figure 3.4   Emerging thematic map for Research Question 1 (prior-to-school educators)

Phase 5 entailed final refinements in defining and naming the themes which helped to determine the essence of what each category entailed. Linking the themes around a central category to enclose everything together was an essential aspect of this phase. It was necessary to consider each theme in relation to one another as well as reflecting over the themes themselves. In this cross-case analysis phase, I sifted through the categories across both cases to highlight any similarities and difference among the teachers' responses. It became clear that some differences existed between the two cases. The conceptual categories developed over time as the segments of texts were reviewed, pondered upon and connections were made. At the completion of this phase, as Braun and Clarke (2006) point out, it was essential I felt I could "clearly define what your themes are and what they are not" (p. 92). The final categories and corresponding theme names were developed so that the reader has an immediate impression of what they were about.

The last phase of analysis was the production and writing of the narrative reports which in itself is an integral and final part of data analysis within qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Denscombe, 2010; Neuman, 2011). This lengthy process involved composing a draft for each case and then reviewing and rewriting to strengthen the coherence of categories and themes as well as endeavouring to "transport the reader into the subjective worldview and meaning system" (Neuman, 2011, p. 551) of the participants.

3.6.3   *Establishing trustworthiness and authenticity*

With regard to validity, over the last 30 years, it has been argued that the transference of terminology across the paradigms is unfitting (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research, criteria for evaluating quality differ from those used in the quantitative inquiry. The on-going discourse and divergence regarding appropriate terminology for validity has steered the

discussion to expound terms that better reveal the nature and uniqueness of qualitative research. Largely, the focus has shifted from the quantitative truth value of statements in research to the qualitative understanding by participants and readers (Creswell, 2013). For many qualitative researchers methodological excellence, in the form of "professional, accurate and systematic" (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 103) research performance is considered to be the key element. Creswell (2013) considers 'validation' in qualitative research to be "an attempt to assess the 'accuracy' of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants" (pp. 249-250). That is, the degree to which there is accuracy between how the participants actually perceive their social realities and how the researcher represents their perspectives (Creswell, 2013). As Patton (2015) explains, in recent years, qualitative inquiry has moved away from the language of validation toward a preference of terms such as 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity'.

For the purposes of this study, Lincoln and Guba's (cited in Mertens, 2015) criteria for establishing trustworthiness and authenticity were used and they argue that standards of rigor can be achieved through their implementation. Their guidelines for addressing trustworthiness include the terminology of credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. Authenticity criteria deal with issues of fairness, conscientiousness and honesty in providing a balanced, genuine and true interpretation of people's experiences, as well as the issue of ontological authenticity.

3.6.4 *Trustworthiness criteria*

In relation to trustworthiness criteria, credibility refers to whether the findings are credible given the data produced (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and checked in keeping with good practice (Denscombe, 2010). Patton (2015) pinpoints the necessity for the researcher to maintain a high standard of ethical conduct throughout the research process as an essential component of credibility. As a researcher, my credibility was founded on many years of teaching experience in early childhood and in tertiary education where ethical behaviour is central to the teaching profession. Therefore, this study was carried out with integrity, intellectual

rigor and in an ethical manner. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement in both the data collection and data analysis phases to ensure emergent findings were saturated and an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon was achieved. Additionally, credibility was developed through creating a rapport with participants through phone calls and email conversations prior to the interview process and this was a key factor in building trust. Member checking also contributed to credibility as the research design allowed the participants to describe their views and beliefs using their voice and then to confirm their responses after transcription and analysis to minimise any misinterpretation or misunderstanding (Maxwell, 2012). Use of direct participant quotations ensured their perspectives were told in their own words. Thus, the findings were grounded in the empirical data (Denscombe, 2010) with detailed scrutiny of the generated text to provide solid conclusions which helped to ensure that "the data are *reasonably likely* to be accurate and appropriate" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 299, italics in original). The semi-structured interview questions allowed for some uniformity in response that supported the coding and categorization as categories and themes emerged. The pilot study addressed issues of coherence and clarity. Triangulation was another technique to increase the credibility of the research so that "viewing things from more than one perspective" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 346) was made possible using different methods, different settings and different sources. Peer debriefing provided for scholarly guidance and external checks of the research process and was used to verify agreement in the data analysis process. Meeting regularly with my principal supervisor and co-supervisor during the analysis phase allowed them to play 'devil's advocate' (Lincoln & Guba cited in Creswell, 2013) in terms of asking challenging questions about meanings and interpretations in relation to the developing themes and categories of my study.

As confirmability refers to the accuracy of the data and the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, the logic used for the interpretation of the data in this study was made visible and explicit. This produced a chain of evidence so that the data were not figments of the researcher's imagination (Denscombe, 2010) and the data can be traced back to

original sources through the extensive use of participant quotes. In this way, the researcher's genuine experiences with the empirical data are revealed. Confirmability was also addressed by the reflexive account of the involvement of the researcher's 'self' and researcher reflection which exposed the stages of research to continual questioning and re-evaluation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Likewise, reflexivity enables the reader to better understand how particular interpretations of the data have been reached.

Transferability relates to assisting the reader to make judgements about the applicability of the research based on similarities and differences to their own context (Denscombe, 2010). In other words, the reader needs to infer the relevance and transference of the findings to other similar situations, or, how they might apply to similar teachers in similar schools and settings. In the current study, the use of thick, rich description to provide sufficient detail about the context and methods through a case study design, together with purposive sampling, helped to enhance transferability. In doing so, the reader is supported to judge whether the methods used and conclusions drawn are justifiable. Yin (2014) suggests that the use of multiple cases, as used in the current study, strengthens transferability.

Lastly, dependability refers to consistency in interpretation. Therefore, the research should be open for audit to ascertain whether the results are dependable and consistent with the data collected and that they make sense (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Yin (2014) suggests maintaining a case study chain of evidence that describes each stage of the research process. In the current study, this was ascertained through the explicit account of the methods and analysis, as well as in recording thoughts about decision-making made throughout the research which enhanced dependability and highlighted the transparency of the process. Furthermore, the provision of a fully reflexive account of the research process allows the reader to follow the trail of research to the arrival at the results.

3.6.5   *Authenticity criteria*

Authenticity criteria are directly related to fairness and the fair, ethical treatment of the participants and respect for all members. Fairness relates to the

quality of an honest, balanced account ensuring that all stakeholder views should be evident in the text (Neuman, 2011). In this study, fairness was achieved through confirming that informed consent procedures were in place, member checking was offered and a range of realities were presented. Ontological authenticity addresses whether the research has raised individual awareness of the participant contexts and of their constructed realities (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011; Mertens, 2015). The opportunity for participants in this study to engage in dialogue in an open and non-judgemental environment as in the interview process and through the provision of sufficient time to do so ensured that each contributor explored reality as an emerging passage. Thus, ontological authenticity was reached through reflective dialogue and the participants came to know their own meaning through the process of articulating and explaining it to the researcher. Participants commented that they enjoyed the opportunity to articulate their views and engage in some professional reflection and attested to a deeper awareness of issues that they had overlooked prior to their involvement in the research.

3.7   Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe and justify the research design through the examination of the interpretive framework and the underlying philosophical assumptions under which the study was constructed and conducted. The selection of a qualitative case study approach including the methods, recruitment of participants, research sites and analytic data procedures were explained within the constructivist paradigm. Ethical considerations were clarified along with the limitations of the study. As a researcher, I wanted to contribute knowledge that is believable and trustworthy and so the concerns for addressing truthfulness and authenticity of the current study were explicated.

Chapter Four will present the key findings together with the conceptual categories and corresponding themes for each of the three research questions. Additionally, the case reports are introduced which explore the within-case analysis of each case to describe the stories and unique insights of the participants. These

highlight teachers' understanding of play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity and include detailed quotes plus the influencing factors for the implementation of play as a medium for learning and teaching throughout the transition process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

"A child who moves from a developmentally appropriate preschool program to a content-focused kindergarten experiences a kind of whiplash"

(Graue, 2011, p. 15)

Introduction

Chapters Four and Five convey the findings in the current study. This chapter presents findings from the interview and document-based source analysis for each of the three subsidiary research questions and the resultant conceptual categories and corresponding themes. The initial section details the analysed cases and documents with the results displayed in table format and also as thematic maps. Firstly, the participants' understandings of play-based pedagogy and their perceived roles within this are presented. Further, their constructs of pedagogic continuity and the importance of this across the transition process follow. Lastly, the influencing factors that relate to participants' decision-making in using play-based pedagogy are depicted. Document and website analysis provided an additional lens, also representing a wider perspective on play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity. The curriculum documents, seminal to teachers' work, were one of the influencing factors on teachers' decisions in relation to practice.

4.1   Research Question One

How do prior-to-school educators and Kindergarten teachers view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based pedagogy?

Findings from this question specifically relate to the understanding educators have of play-based pedagogy and their role within this. This research question correlates to participant responses to interview questions one to six (see Appendix 2) and were analysed using thematic analysis. Each case was analysed separately and all subsequent interview questions were analysed using the same method of thematic coding. Thematic analysis was undertaken for each interview

question that related to research question one, as shown in Table 4.1 below. The unit of analysis was the sentence. Each sentence was written in full. Alongside is the summary analysis which is the interpretation of what the text said followed by a categorisation of what the text was about. The final part of the analysis was the generation of a theme or themes that captured the essence of the text.

Table 4.1 shows one such extract of the thematic analysis, followed by Table 4.2 and Figure 4.1 which show each of the three categories generated from the examples (Play as active exploration; Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy; and the Roles of the educator) and the themes identified within those categories. This information was then summarised and presented in Figure 4.2 as the themes identified. The findings for each case's responses to research question one are presented together to provide ease of comparison.

Table 4.1   Sample extract of summary table for thematic analysis of Research Question 1 (prior-to-school educators)

Res Ques 1. How do prior-to-school educators view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based pedagogy?			
Text	**Summary**	**Category**	**Theme/s**
So basically the children are learning what they need to learn, through play. That can be the materials that we provide, the experiences we provide, set up on our observations of those children, just the things that we've got set out to stimulate their learning through play. So that's my understanding of it, is at this age, that's the way they learn, is through their play, by engaging in play.	Viewed as the materials and experiences that teachers provide, based on observations of the children. That's how children learn - through play.	*Role of the educator* Provide materials, experiences. *Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy* Is based on observations of the children. That's how young children learn - through play.	Supportive behaviours- Educator as facilitator and planner Child-centred learning possibilities
You need the educators there interacting with the children to make that happen, to make learning happen. It doesn't just happen if you sit back.	For learning to occur, educators need to interact with the children during play.	*Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy* Need to interact with the children to make learning happen.	Responsive pedagogical interaction
A play-based curriculum involves children learning by actually doing something… their hands totally immersed into the - to understand it.	Play-based learning involves children doing something, using their hands to understand.	*Play as active exploration* Children learn by doing, getting their hands immersed into the play.	Experience based
I can see it, when we set experiences up for the children, when we organise our learning space, you can see what the children can learn from that. Just through observing them as well, and planning and learning from	Educators can see what children learn through observation and planning of experiences.	*Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy* Evidence of learning is seen in experiences and the organised learning space *Role of the educator* Provide experiences,	Child-centred learning possibilities Supportive behaviours-

what you've observed, you can see how much they can learn.		organise learning space, observe and plan for play	Educator as facilitator, planner and observer
So to me, having the play-based learning, means that they can learn it, but they can experience it, and they can practice it over and over again, until they're competent with it basically.	Play based learning offers children opportunities to experience and practice what they have learnt.	*Play as active exploration* Children can learn, experience and practice over and over again until they are competent	Experience based
It needs to come from a planning perspective, an observational perspective, but you can just see how much they can learn through play.	Needs to come from an observation and planning perspective.	*Role of the educator* Plan for play –it needs to come from observations.	Supportive behaviours- Educator as planner and observer
But it's coming from them; it's not coming from me. So that's the importance of it I think…it's important that they want to learn.	Needs to come from them, not me. Important that they want to learn.	*Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy* Motivation to learn needs to come from the children.	Child-centred learning possibilities
Instigator is one of the things that I think we do, instigate different learning through play. A supporter as well, like supporting children and encouraging children. I demonstrate some tasks and skills, so demonstrate and model.	Instigate learning, support and encourage children's learning, demonstrate and model.	*Role of the educator* Educator's role is instigator, supporter, encouraging, demonstrating and modelling.	Supportive and mediating behaviours
I see them really learn a lot from one another. In these informal play scenarios is often where I see the children learn the most skills through one another with teachers scaffolding.	Children learn a lot from one another, and from teachers scaffolding in informal play scenarios.	*Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy* Children learn a lot from one another in informal play scenarios. *Role of the educator* Educators scaffold learning.	Collaboration with peers Mediating behaviour- Educator as scaffolder

4.1.1   Case study one – prior-to-school educators

After analysis of the interview responses relating to this question, three categories were evident. They were (1) Play as active exploration; (2) Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy and; (3) Roles of educator in play-based pedagogy. From the three categories, seven themes were identified which can be represented as a summary of thematic findings included in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2   Summary of thematic analysis for Research Question 1 (prior-to-school educators)

Res Ques 1. How do prior-to-school educators view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based pedagogy?

Play as active exploration **[category]**
 	
        [themes]
 • **self-discovery**
     - self-choice areas
     - discover

- uninterrupted time
- letting them find things out
- exploring
- **experience based**
  - hands-on
  - active learning
  - doing
  - using their senses
  - touching
  - practice
  - experience

Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy   [category]

[themes]
- **child-centred learning possibilities**
  - child-driven
  - is relevant/meaningful to children
  - child-initiated learning
  - connects to children's lives and personal experiences
  - meaning-making
  - learning is evident
  - based on observations/interests of children
  - transfer of knowledge is possible
- **responsive pedagogical interaction**
  - using teachable moments
  - teaching strategies
  - educator's presence/being there
  - helping children form relationships
  - being involved/interacting
  - organise small group interactions
  - shape their play
  - talk with the children during play/give feedback
- **collaboration with peers**
  - involves peers
  - children interacting/supporting each other
  - teach each other/learn from peers
  - supported by peer scaffolding
  - social learning
  - peer relationships

Roles of educator in play-based pedagogy   [category]

[themes]
- **supportive behaviours**
  - instigating
  - listening
  - guiding
  - modelling
  - facilitating play
  - encouraging
  - extending resources
  - supporting
  - observing
  - planning
  - documenting
- **mediating behaviours**
  - questioning
  - scaffolding
  - demonstrating

In order to provide a quick reference overview for the first research question, Figure 4.1 presents a summary of the three identified categories together with the corresponding seven themes as a thematic map for Case study one.
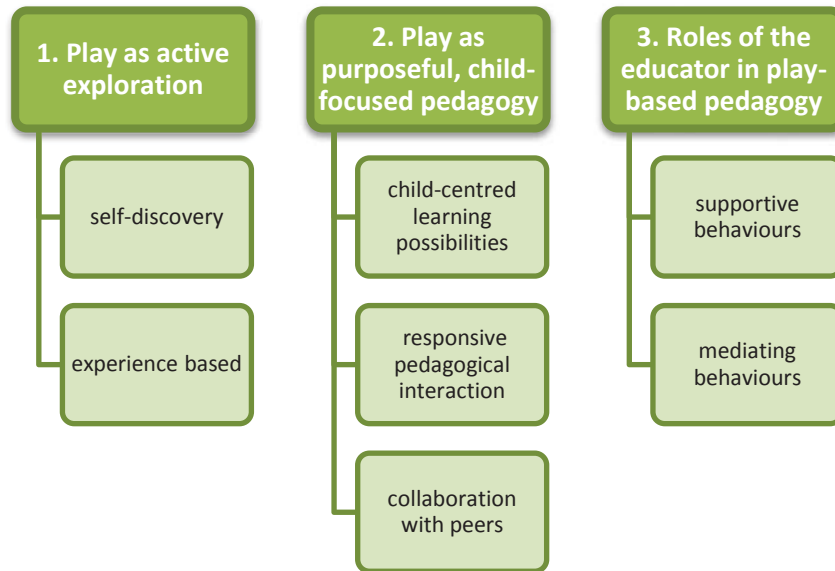
Figure 4.1   Thematic map of identified categories and themes for Research Question 1 (prior-to-school educators)

4.1.2   Case study two – Kindergarten teachers

After analysis of the responses for this group of participants relating to research question one, four categories were evident. They were (1) Play as active exploration; (2) Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy; (3) Limited place for play; and (4) Role of educator in play-based pedagogy. From the four categories, eight themes were identified which can be represented as a summary of thematic findings in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3   Summary of thematic analysis for Research Question 1 (Kindergarten teachers)

Res Ques 1. How do Kindergarten teachers view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based pedagogy?

Play as active exploration   [category]
 	
        [themes]
•   **self-discovery**
    -    exploring for themselves
    -    open-ended learning

- not directed
- child-directed
- space to explore
- free choice
- discovery
- not much scaffolding
- **experience based**
  - hands-on
  - active learning
  - manipulating
  - doing
  - touch and feel/tactile
  - live it
  - practice
  - experience/experience it

Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy   [category]

[theme]
- **collaboration with peers**
  - working with each other
  - talking with peers
  - peer reinforcement
  - explaining to each other

Limited place for play   [category]

[themes]
- **play as organised games/free time**
  - games used to support learning
  - free play time after finishing work
  - games for hands-on activities
  - play as free time during transition period
  - free play at end of day when tired
- **constrained play**
  - has to be structured play/too structured in school
  - educators choose activities
  - structured to learning outcomes
  - structured into rotation activities
  - used to fit into unit of work or part of a lesson
  - needs to fit into a session in the day
  - limited to certain curriculum areas
- **marginalisation of play**
  - explicit teaching required to learn, not play
  - play only valuable for short transition period at beginning of year
  - need to reach teaching targets and can't through play
  - have to align teaching practices to school targets

Roles of the educator in play-based pedagogy   [category]

[themes]
- **supportive behaviours**
  - providing structure
  - supervising
  - guiding
  - facilitating
  - encouraging
  - supporting
  - observing
  - documenting
  - extending
- **mediating behaviours**
  - questioning
  - providing structure/instructions

- demonstrating - explaining - instructing - co-player - directing - scaffolding

In order to provide a quick reference overview for the first research question, figure 4.2 presents a summary of the four identified categories together with the corresponding eight themes as a thematic map for Case study two.

Figure 4.2   Thematic map of identified categories and themes for Research Question 1 (Kindergarten teachers)

4.2   Research Question Two

<u>What do prior-to-school educators and Kindergarten teachers believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?</u>

This research question pertained to educators' constructs of pedagogic continuity. The responses to interview questions seven to ten formed the basis of collecting data associated with what they believed was important when considering continuity of learning and teaching for children entering the first year of formal schooling.

4.2.1   *Case study one – prior-to-school educators*

Following analysis of the prior-to-school participant responses, three categories were identified together with seven themes. The categories were as follows: (1) Differing expectations; (2) Academic push-down; and (3) Aspects of enhancing continuity. Table 4.4 below illustrates a summary of the data for the prior-to-school educators for research question two.

Table 4.4   Summary of thematic analysis for Research Question 2 (prior-to-school educators)

Res Ques 2. What do prior-to-school educators believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?

Differing expectations   [category]

      [themes]
- **minimal continuity and cross over**
  - school not based around play
  - very few schools ask for a report or information
  - is no continuity/minimal crossover
  - big difference in environments/different atmosphere
  - not a lot of flow between the two environments
  - is a totally different learning environment
- **the shock of formal learning**
  - transition from play-based approach to formal learning is difficult
  - the children will get so shocked
  - a big change to very formal teaching
  - very different atmosphere sitting at desks
  - very different type of teaching/learning
  - pedagogic continuity needed to lessen shock of school
  - preparation is important to minimise shock
  - difference between preschool and school learning is too extreme
  - should prepare children for big change in learning context

Academic push-down   [category]

      [themes]
- **notions of school readiness**
  - incorporate some school pedagogy and practices to help children prepare for transition
  - basic skills preparation is important
  - EYLF is not enough to prepare children for school
  - EYLF should have an additional outcome for school transition preparation
  - preschool is for preparing children for school
  - primary pedagogy informs teaching of academic skills in preschool
- **the 'schoolification' of preschool**
  - do more formal teaching experiences
  - do some modelling and demonstrating like in school
  - practice to sit down and concentrate
  - giving stamps as rewards for writing words
  - use of Jolly Phonics program
  - incorporate Kindergarten curriculum into preschool curriculum
  - pressure of formal teaching too early
  - have more structured, task oriented group times
  - use school-like rotation activities/have learning stations
  - more academic skills

Aspects of enhancing continuity   [category]

[themes]
- **play as a transition bridge**
  - play helps to ease into school and formal teaching
  - play would help lessen the shock
  - should start with a play-based approach
  - play keeps the flow of familiar learning
  - play allows children to act out their transition worries
  - play affords skills they can transfer to school
  - play develops positive learning dispositions for school
  - free choice in play experiences helps ease transition
- **collaborative exchange**
  - continuity of learning should be about sharing information between the two environments
  - more exchanging of information/shared visits
  - transitions are less stressful if information is shared
  - should be open communication between the settings
  - documenting children's learning and talking with other educators helps with transition
  - schools need to read EC reports to ease transition
- **recognition of prior learning experiences**
  - schools need to validate the information provided by EC educators
  - use EC reports and portfolios for orientation or as a starting place
  - school staff need to understand children's current level of learning
  - EC reports would help primary teachers understand children's current level of learning

---

In order to provide a quick reference overview for the second research question, Figure 4.3 presents a summary of the three identified categories together with the corresponding seven themes as a thematic map for Case study one.

Figure 4.3   Thematic map of identified categories and themes for Research Question 2 (prior-to-school educators)

4.2.2   Case study two – Kindergarten teachers

After analysing the responses of the Kindergarten teachers, eight themes were identified within three categories. The three categories consisted of: (1) Differing expectations; (2) Academic push-down; and (3) Aspects of enhancing continuity. Table 4.5 summarises the thematic analysis for the three categories and the eight themes.

Table 4.5   Summary of thematic analysis for Research Question 2 (Kindergarten teachers)

Res Ques 2. What do Kindergarten teachers believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?

Differing expectations   [category]
 	
    [themes]
• **minimal continuity and crossover**
    - little communication/continuity
    - our expectations are far apart
    - school is very different/very regimented
    - two different concepts and settings
    - no conversation between the two settings
    - not seamless/not a smooth transition
    - philosophies don't coincide
• **the shock of formal learning**
    - big gap in style of learning between preschool and school
    - very different learning expectations
    - huge separation/harsh difference in learning
    - big step/big leap in learning between the two
    - huge cut-off between learning styles
• **the play/work divide**
    - school = learning, not playing
    - school is structured with formal learning
    - sit and learn, not play
    - play and learning doesn't work
    - playing is not work/is not a medium for learning
    - playing does not meet outcomes or learning focus
 	
Academic push-down   [category]
 	
    [themes]
• **notions of school readiness**
    - Best Start assessment
    - focus on literacy and numeracy with links to EYLF
    - is the child ready for school?
    - academic focus is important
    - need a skill set
    - readiness to learn
    - school readiness is important
• **crowded curriculum and less play**
    - intense academic program in first year of school
    - free play reduced and work content increased
    - formal learning program has no space for play
    - curriculum is so packed/not enough time
    - children need to be at a particular point/reach a particular level
    - crammed curriculum so less time to fit in play

- so much content to pick up

Aspects of enhancing continuity   [category]

[themes]
- **play as a transition bridge**
  - free play in afternoons
  - play in first few weeks of school
  - model the play in preschools in early weeks of school
  - have play experiences to continue the learning from preschool
- **collaborative exchange**
  - more exchange of information
  - open dialogue needed
- **recognition of prior learning experiences**
  - need to know where children are coming from/what they did at preschool
  - build on children's learning from preschool
  - find out what they bring
  - use information sheet from preschool

In order to provide a quick reference overview for the second research question, Figure 4.3 presents a summary of the three identified categories together with the corresponding eight themes as a thematic map for Case study two.

Figure 4.4   Thematic map of identified categories and themes for Research Question 2 (Kindergarten teachers)

4.3   Research Question Three

What factors influence prior-to-school educators and Kindergarten teachers' decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?

This research question related to identified factors that influence teachers' decisions to implement play-based pedagogy across the transition process and any constraints they encountered. Interview questions eleven and twelve specifically correlated to this research question.

4.3.1 Case study one – prior-to-school educators

After analysing the responses of the prior-to-school educators, five themes were identified within the two categories. The two categories consisted of: 1) Intrinsic factors; and 2) Extrinsic factors. Table 4.6 summarises the thematic analysis for the two categories and the five themes.

Table 4.6   Summary of thematic analysis for Research Question 3 (prior-to-school educators)

Res Ques 3. What factors influence prior-to-school educators' decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?

Intrinsic factors   [category]

  [theme]
- **personal knowledge**
  - theoretical knowledge
  - staff qualifications
  - experience
  - belief systems (personal)

Extrinsic factors   [category]

  [themes]
- **physical aspects**
  - building
  - environment
- **organisational aspects**
  - routines
  - staff ratio
  - time
  - culture/philosophy
  - recording systems
  - regulations
  - curriculums
  - being part of a larger organisation
- **financial aspects**
  - equipment
  - available resources
  - SES of families
  - funding
- **attitudinal aspects**
  - belief systems (families) – parent expectations and perceptions
  - beliefs systems (community/political) – perceptions/misunderstanding

In order to provide a quick reference overview for the third research question, Figure 4.5 presents a summary of the two identified categories together with the corresponding five themes as a thematic map for Case study one.
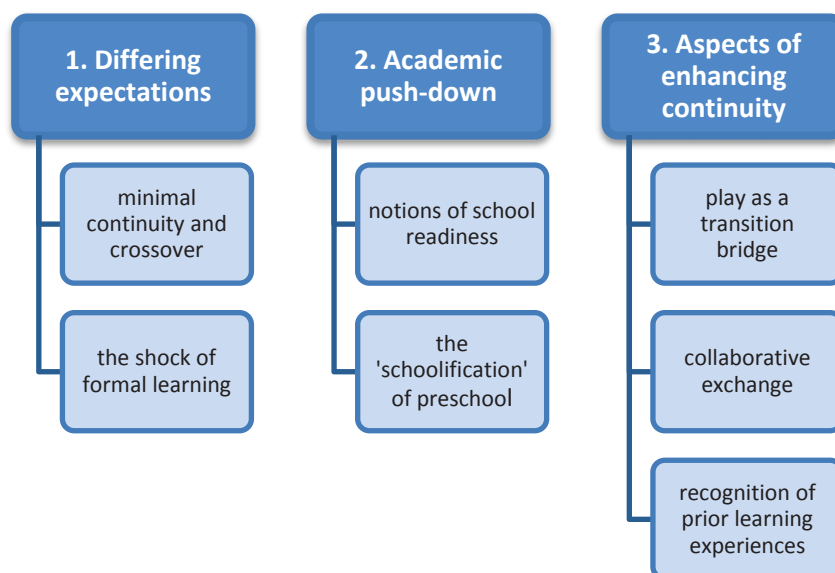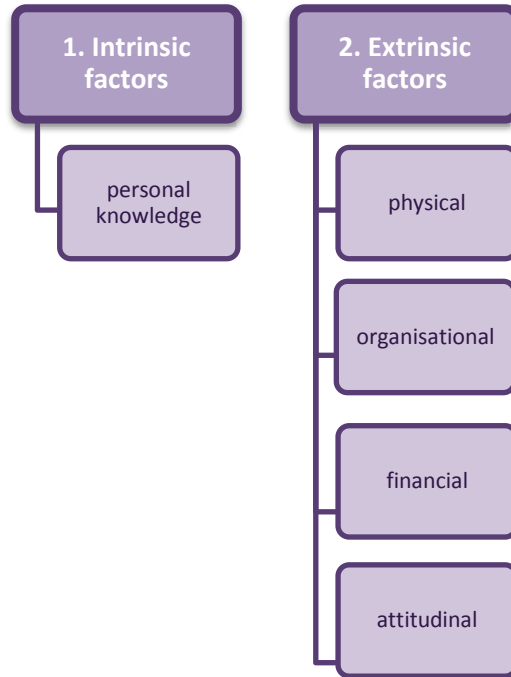

Figure 4.5   Thematic map of identified categories and themes for Research Question 3 (prior-to-school educators)

4.3.2   Case study two – Kindergarten teachers

Following the analysis of the interview responses from Kindergarten teachers, two categories together with five themes were identified. The two categories consisted of: (1) Intrinsic factors; and (2) Extrinsic factors. Table 4.7 summarises the thematic analysis for the research question three.

Table 4.7   Summary of thematic analysis for Research Question 3 (Kindergarten teachers)

Res Ques 3. What factors influence Kindergarten teachers' decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?

Intrinsic factors   [category]
 	
    [theme]
•   **personal knowledge**
        -    experience
        -    dispositions

- belief systems (personal)

Extrinsic factors   [category]

[themes]
- **physical aspects**
  - classroom environment
- **organisational/structural aspects**
  - staff ratio
  - timetabling issues
  - school system/school curriculum outcomes
- **financial aspects**
  - SES of families
  - available resources
- **beliefs of others**
  - belief systems (families) – parent expectations and perceptions
  - beliefs systems (others) – perceptions/misunderstanding

In order to provide a quick reference overview for the third research question, Figure 4.6 presents a summary of the two identified categories together with the corresponding five themes as a thematic map for Case study two.
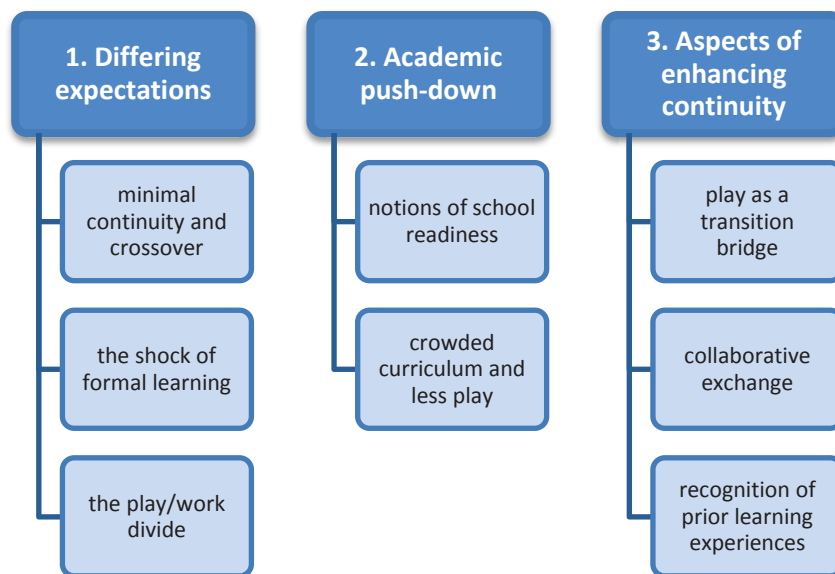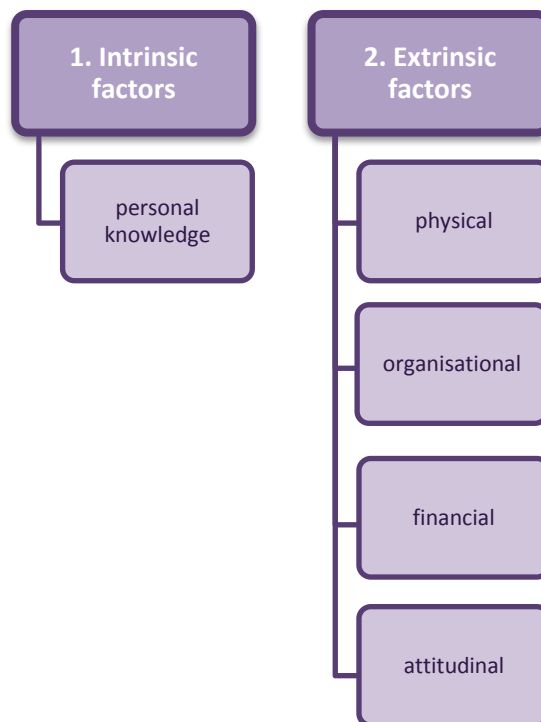

Figure 4.6   Thematic map of identified categories and themes for Research Question 3 (Kindergarten teachers)

4.4   Document and website analysis

In order to ascertain how play-based pedagogy, educator roles, pedagogic continuity and any influencing factors are constructed within key curriculum and transition documents associated with the transition process, four documents were used and these were supplemented with analysis of related websites and online publications linked to transition provided to teachers. The key documents were: the *EYLF*, the *Australian Curriculum*, the *Foundations for Learning: Relationships between the Early Years Learning Framework,* and the *NSW Transition to School Statement* plus the accompanying information sheets for early childhood educators and school teachers. They were analysed and thematically coded using the same procedure as outlined for the interviews.

Analysis of these documents was undertaken as they would potentially play a role in shaping teachers attitudes and perceptions about what transition to school encompasses and what role play for learning should hold in their pedagogy. This analysis is divided into three sections: a) as related to research question one, the analysis identified guidance these documents offered to teachers in relation to play-based pedagogy and what their role should be within this; b) as related to research question two, document analysis sought to establish how these documents might shape teacher perceptions in relation to pedagogic continuity; and c) as related to research question three, the analysis focused on what might influence teachers' decision related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process.

4.4.1   Play-based pedagogy and the educator's role within that as related to Research Question One

Analysis of the documents and websites related to the topic of research question one about constructions of play-based pedagogy and the roles of the educator in play-based pedagogy. Following the analysis of the online documents three categories together with eight themes were identified. The three categories consisted of: 1) Play as active exploration; 2) Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy; and 3) Role of the educator in play-based pedagogy. Table 4.8

summarises the collective thematic document and website analysis in relation to research question one with key documents, publications and/or website sources identified within the labelled themes for each category.

Table 4.8   *Summary of thematic analysis of document-based sources as related to Research Question 1*

Res Ques 1. How is play-based pedagogy constructed within key document-based sources and how do these describe teachers' roles in play-based pedagogy?

Play as active exploration   **[category]**

       [themes]
- **self-discovery**
    - discovery [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - improvise [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - create [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - learn through exploration [ECA-ACARA paper]
- **experience based**
    - children are active participants [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper, Transition to School position statement, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - engage actively [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - actively construct their own learning [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - use their senses [ECA-ACARA paper, Educators' Guide to EYLF]

Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy   **[category]**

       [themes]
- **child-centred learning possibilities**
    - meaning-making [EYLF]
    - expands children's thinking [EYLF]
    - test out ideas [EYLF]
    - enhances desire to know and learn [EYLF]
    - promotes positive learning dispositions [EYLF]
    - children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking [EYLF]
    - purposeful play [ECA-ACARA paper]
- **responsive pedagogical interaction**
    - adult's active role [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper]
    - involvement/highly involved adults [EYLF]
    - use teaching strategies [EYLF]
    - support inclusion [EYLF]
    - being responsive to children's ideas and play [EYLF]
    - engage children actively [EYLF]
    - make use of spontaneous 'teachable moments' [EYLF]
    - promote small group interactions [EYLF]
    - adults join in play [EYLF]
- **collaboration with peers**
    - learning is a social activity [EYLF]
    - value collaborative learning [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - play with other children [EYLF]
    - power of stimulating interactions with peers [ECA-ACARA paper]
    - interacting with other children [KU transition publication]

Roles of educator in play-based pedagogy   **[category]**

       [themes]
- **supportive behaviours**
    - plan, assess and monitor children's learning [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper, Educators' Guide to EYLF]

- facilitate (design and create learning environments) [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
- modelling [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
- documenting [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
- **mediating behaviours**
  - interacting positively [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - intentional teaching [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - scaffolding [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - open-ended questioning [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper]
  - providing feedback [EYLF]
  - sustained shared conversations [EYLF]
  - co-player [Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - co-constructing knowledge and meaning [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - problem-solving [EYLF]
  - speculating [EYLF]
  - explaining [EYLF]
- **reflective behaviours**
  - reflective practice [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - critical reflection [EYLF]
  - professional inquiry [EYLF]
  - on-going cycle of review [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - reflect on pedagogy [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper]

In order to provide a quick reference overview of the document-based analysis as related to research question one, Figure 4.7 presents a summary of the three emergent categories together with the corresponding eight themes as a thematic map.

Figure 4.7   Thematic map of identified categories and themes in document-based analysis as related to Research Question 1

4.4.2 *Constructs of pedagogic continuity as related to Research Question Two*

Analysis of the online documents related to the topic of research question two about constructions of pedagogic continuity. Following the analysis three categories together with six themes were identified. The three categories were: 1) Differing expectations; 2) Academic push-down; and 3) Aspects of enhancing continuity. Table 4.9 summarises the thematic document analysis as related to research question two.

Table 4.9   *Summary of thematic analysis of document-based sources as related to Research Question 2*

Res Ques 2. How is pedagogic continuity constructed in relation to the transition process within key online document-based sources?
Differing expectations [category] [themes] • **minimal continuity and crossover** - starting school is a big step/big change [Raising Children Network] - schools and EC service systems currently not well integrated [Centre for Community Child Health policy brief] • **the shock of formal learning** - a larger more structured school setting can be overwhelming [National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc] - a focus on formal educational learning experiences [National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc] - major source of discontinuity is the change in curricula and teaching strategies [Centre for Community Child Health policy brief] - abrupt change in teaching style and content [Centre for Community Child Health policy brief] **Academic push-down** [category] [themes] • **notions of school readiness** - information on school readiness skills [Community Child-Care Co-operative] - focus on school readiness in all areas [Community Child-Care Co-operative] - effective school readiness experiences [Community Child-Care Co-operative] - support children's school readiness [National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc] - incorporate school based activities as part of the early childhood program [National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc] - ready to learn [NSW Transition to School statement information sheet for EC educators and school teachers] - school readiness activities [NSW Education website] - Best Start assessment [NSW Education website, BOSTES website] **Aspects of enhancing continuity** [category] [themes] • **play as a transition bridge** - enables children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper] - the way 'play' is used for learning may change as students move through the grades [ECA-ACARA paper]

- opportunities for children to use play to process and make sense of experience [ECA-ACARA paper]
- participate in play to help with school [National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc]
- learning about numbers and letters as part of play [National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc]
- introduce more play-based approaches in early stages of school [Centre for Community Child Health policy brief]
- **collaborative exchange**
  - educators from early childhood settings and schools commit to sharing information [EYLF, ECA-ACARA paper, Community Child-Care Co-operative, National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc, NSW Department of Education and Communities information sheet, Transition to School position statement, NSW Transition to School statement information sheet for EC educators and school teachers]
  - exchange information with professionals in other settings [EYLF, National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc]
  - encourage collaboration, connection and strong coordination between professionals working in different types of EC settings [ECA-ACARA paper, Transition to School position statement, BOSTES website, Educators' Guide to EYLF, NSW Transition to School statement information sheet for EC educators and school teachers]
  - establish systems for communication within and between early childhood settings [ECA-ACARA paper, Centre for Community Child Health policy brief]
  - collaboration between educators and education leaders in varied early learning environments [ECA-ACARA paper]
- **recognition of previous learning experiences**
  - provide for continuity in experiences [EYLF]
  - build on children's existing knowledge [EYLF]
  - build on children's prior and current experiences [EYLF, BOSTES website, Centre for Community Child Health policy brief, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - ensure that children's prior learning is valued [ECA-ACARA paper, NSW Department of Education and Communities information sheet]
  - build on what children know and can do/prior learning [ECA-ACARA paper, NSW Transition to School statement information sheet for EC educators and school teachers]
  - build on the learning children achieve under the EYLF [ECA-ACARA paper, NSW Transition to School statement information sheet for school teachers]
  - taking the child on from where they are in knowledge [ECA-ACARA paper]
  - continuity of support for children's learning across transition points [ECA-ACARA paper]
  - establish children's prior knowledge, skills, dispositions and understandings [ECA-ACARA paper]
  - value the learning that has gone on before [ECA-ACARA paper]

In order to provide a quick reference overview of the document-based analysis as related to research question two, Figure 4.8 presents a summary of the three identified categories together with the corresponding six themes as a thematic map.
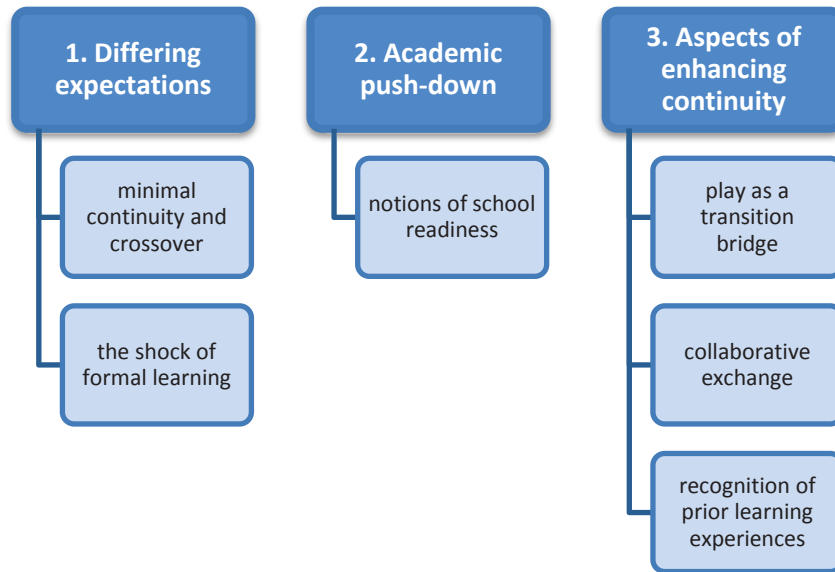
Figure 4.8   Thematic map of identified categories and themes in document-based analysis as related to Research Question 2

4.4.3 *Influencing factors in teachers' decisions to use play-based pedagogy as related to Research Question Three*

Analysis of the online documents related to the topic of research question three about influencing factors in educators' decisions to use play-based pedagogy. Following the analysis two categories together with five themes were identified. The categories were: 1) Intrinsic factors; and 2) Extrinsic factors. Table 4.10 summarises the thematic document analysis in relation to research question three.

Table 4.10   Summary of thematic analysis of document-based sources as related to Research Question 3

Res Ques 3. What factors portrayed in online document-based sources influence teachers' decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?

Intrinsic factors   [category]
 	
        [theme]
• **personal knowledge**
    - theoretical knowledge [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - educators' professional knowledge and skills [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - experience [EYLF]
    - personal styles [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
    - personal beliefs and values [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]

Extrinsic factors [category]

[themes]
- **physical aspects**
  - learning environments and play spaces (indoor and outdoor) [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
- **organisational/structural aspects**
  - routines [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - time [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - recording systems/assessment [EYLF]
  - curriculum [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
- **financial aspects**
  - available materials/resources [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
- **beliefs of others**
  - belief systems (families) – expectations, practices, values and attitudes [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]
  - beliefs systems (others) –UN Conventions of Rights of Child – children's right to play, theorists, community [EYLF, Educators' Guide to EYLF]

In order to provide a quick reference overview of the online document-based analysis as related to research question three, Figure 4.9 presents a summary of the two emergent categories together with the corresponding five themes as a thematic map.
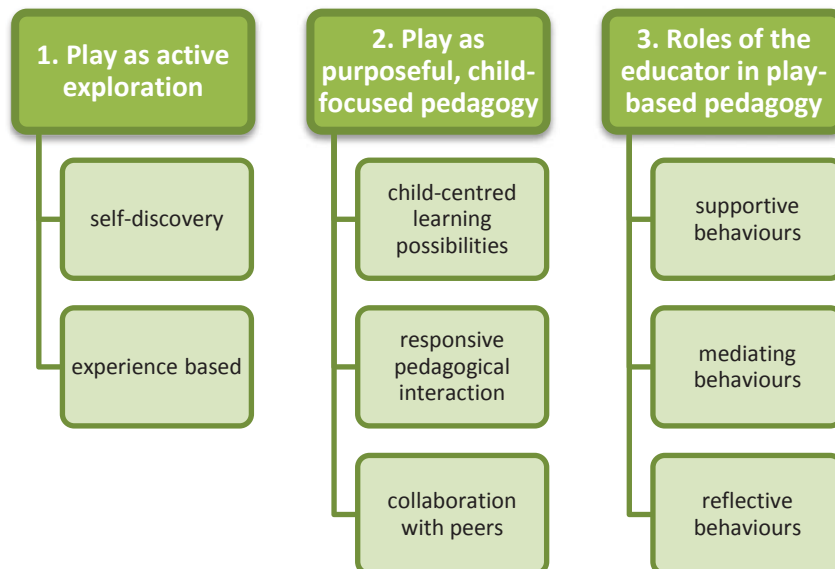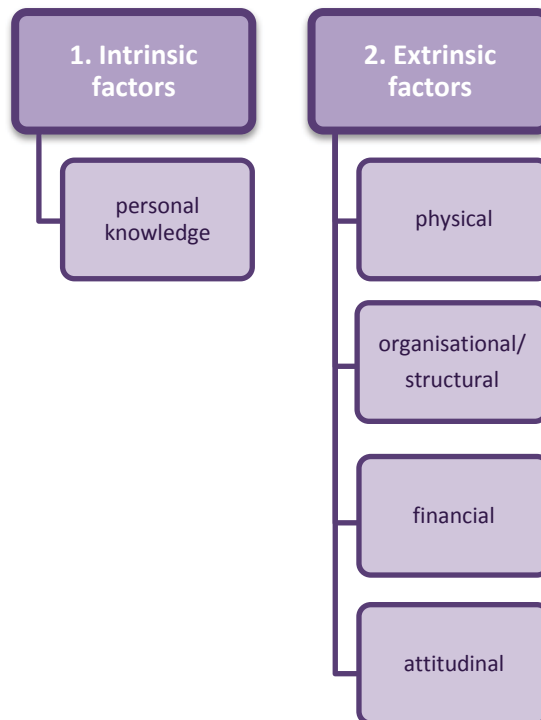

Figure 4.9   Thematic map of identified categories and themes in document-based analysis as related to Research Question 3

There is a noticeable absence of references to the Australian Curriculum within the document-based analyses as it does not focus on pedagogy or pedagogic continuity but instead centres on content and proficiency strands that need to be attained within each of the school years.

4.5   Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the analysis of the teacher interviews for each case and also the document-based analysis according to the three research questions. The resultant categories and related themes were displayed in both table format and as thematic maps. In order to provide an overview of the combined identified categories across the three research questions Figure 4.10 represents these as a thematic map.
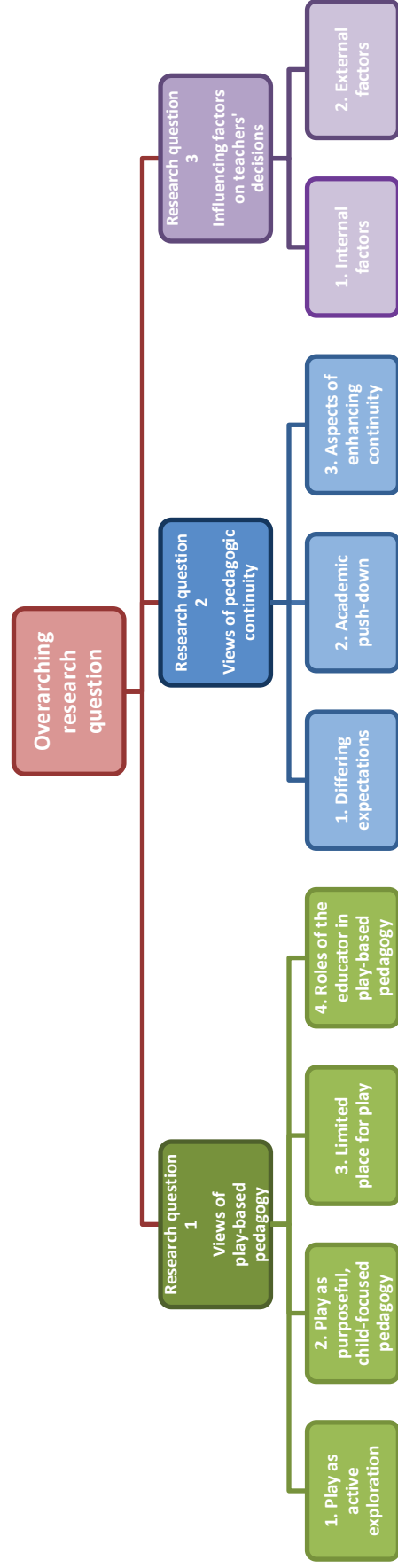
Figure 4.10   Overall thematic map of categories from interview and document-based analysis for Research Questions 1, 2 & 3

CHAPTER FIVE: NARRATIVE CASE REPORTS

"The growing allocation of kindergarten time to academic content has firmly pushed play to the edges"

(Graue, 2011, p. 150)

Introduction

In this section two case reports are included that describe the within-case analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to capture participants' perspectives, understandings and constructs of play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity, together with influencing factors, as described and experienced by them across the transition to school process. They describe participant beliefs as case study narrative reports to tell the story of the findings, allowing the story to unfold from the rich and multifaceted accounts, clearly separated from interpretations or conclusions. As Flyvbjerg (2011) so eloquently and simply explains, "the case story is itself the result. It is a 'virtual reality', so to speak" (p. 312). Each report is unique and diverse, and the participants' responses are represented as direct quotes. In this manner, it leaves the capacity for readers of different backgrounds to construct diverse interpretations and draw varied conclusions so that the study becomes "different things to different people" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 312). The first case presented is the prior-to-school educators followed by the second case of Kindergarten teachers. Participants provided their perspectives through the semi-structured guided interview process.

5.1   Case Report One – Prior-to-school Educators

5.1.1   *Research Question One – How do prior-to-school educators view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based pedagogy?*

Prior-to-school educators presented multi-dimensional outlooks and stances on play as a medium for learning. When participants were asked to explain *"what is*

your understanding about play as a medium for learning?" this question yielded the shortest responses of all questions asked in the interview protocol. Educators varied in how they defined play-based learning and articulation of a clear, unified definition was elusive. One participant summed it up as follows:

> EC2: *Play… Such a huge term…Yeah, it's like it's indescribable.*

Their explanations did include elements of fun, choice and a sense of naturalness that they believe contribute to higher forms of learning and a less formal, directive approach to teaching:

> EC1: *I think too, if you make learning fun, the children are much more likely to become involved and go to a higher level of learning, rather than the rote teaching, where you're basically trying to pound it into them, that's my understanding.*
>
> EC2: *Play is an - it's an indirect way of teaching the children, isn't it? It's informal.*
>
> EC3: *I think during play they are themselves. They're relaxed and they're natural [laughs]. Yeah they do what they want to do and that's the time where you can teach them through those teachable moments.*

Play-based learning was the dominant pedagogy used in these services and educators recognised that this is what they engaged in every day:

> EC2: *It's always part of our day. We have our morning play. We have our afternoon play… The whole day is play. The whole day is sitting with the kids, playing with them.*
>
> EC3: *I mean teaching through play I think is kind of what I do all day.*

5.1.1.1 Play as active exploration

All participant responses positioned children as active constructors of their learning. Several key words and terms occurred repeatedly as educators expressed their views in relation to the meanings they held about the experiential aspect of play: "hands-on", "doing", "touching", "practise", and "experience it". Thus, educators concurred that children learn by being active:

EC1:   *So to me, having the play-based learning, means that they can learn it, but they can experience it, and they can practice it over and over again, until they're competent with it basically.*

EC4:   *A play-based curriculum involves children learning by actually doing something… their hands totally immersed into the - to understand it.*

5.1.1.2 Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy

All four stressed their personal belief in the importance of play and emphasised that they considered that this is how children learn best and that progression in learning was visible. Their explanations highlighted their opinions of the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach, exemplified in comments such as:

EC1:   *That's the way they learn, so that's the main reason. For me I've always had a play-based philosophy, and I've seen the results of that, and you can really see children make lots of gains throughout the year, through that way of teaching.*

EC2:   *I think it's so important. I think without play there would be no learning, or very little.*

EC3:   *I do believe very strongly that it is the strongest form of learning…*

Understandings about play-based pedagogy revolved around prioritising the child and centred on the idea of planning from children's interests. Most commented on the importance of employing an observational perspective and using children's input to assist in inspiration for planned learning experiences. Typical views included:

EC1:   *Just through observing them as well, and planning and learning from what you've observed, you can see how much they can learn… But it's coming from them; it's not coming from me. So that's the importance of it I think.*

EC4:   *We watch and see how they use those play materials and we follow children's suggestions on what they want to do with those materials or what they would like to be extended with those materials.*

Their stated views about how they felt play-based learning was used in the settings expressed the importance of a prepared environment that included both the indoors and outdoors. Programming and planning by means of a team focus was a central

aspect in how they implemented a play-based approach. One educator explained it as follows:

> EC4:   *Well, obviously we talk about it in program meetings and use the other educators that are in the preschool. We talk about it in staff meetings. We talk about it twice a week, what we call programming meetings… So it's really that teamwork of contributing ideas to learning that the children's play does develop.*

The educators explained that they plan for their environments to be comprised of specific self-choice learning areas or centres based on children's interests, family input, local events, or concepts they felt children need to experience. Learning was on-going and mainly occurred in small group experiences or individual interactions, and sometimes in large groups.

> EC1:   *Basically the way we implement play, we have some activities out that are self-choice areas, but they're based on, it might be an observation we've seen or an interest of a child, or a discussion with a family… So that's the main way we do, is setting up the environment and having educators there to interact and support and encourage, and also separating the children at times into small groups, for certain interests.*

> EC2:   *So most of our play is small group play. You'll very rarely find all 20-something children come together…we have that opportunity to sit down with a small group of children and actually talk to them and discuss with them certain topics and issues.*

Each participant also acknowledged the importance of the involvement of a responsive adult in children's play. Of significance for these educators was their active role in supporting children's learning. They explained that they believed educators should be present and engaged in children's play for learning to ensue. For example, preschool educators 1 and 2 offered:

> EC1:   *You need the educators there interacting with the children to make that happen, to make learning happen. It doesn't just happen if you sit back… it's play-based through educative relationships with the children.*

> EC2:   *I do think that the teacher's - the educator's - role is so extremely important in the child's play. I just think you can't set an area up and then just walk away from it.*

Two of the educators (high SES and low EAL) also stressed that play-based pedagogy involved peer interaction and collaborative support. These participants

shared that learning was enriched when peers scaffolded one another and there were opportunities for co-construction of learning between them. For instance, they proposed:

> EC3: *I see them really learn a lot from one another. In these informal play scenarios is often where I see the children learn the most skills through one another…*

> EC4: *I see peers as a very strong component of that as well. What they learn from peers.*

5.1.1.3 Roles of the educator in play-based pedagogy

After pondering how they viewed their roles in using play as medium for learning and teaching, educators offered descriptions of strategies they employ and explained they assumed a wide repertoire of roles in order to maximise children's learning. Their accounts portrayed a range along a continuum from indirect support to more direct engagement. Generally, their responses reflected a greater prominence of low-interaction supportive strategies. With regard to these, all the participants mentioned a key role was to be an observer. However, their interpretations were not of passive bystanders but of active on-lookers. Sometimes this observation was to help inform room planning or to establish children's learning requirements. At other times it was to refrain from interfering in, and directing, children's inquiry and to promote their self-discoveries.

> EC4: *The one thing I have found about myself over time is you've got to stand back from being the teacher and observing them and not wanting to take over… you have this knowledge and you want to impart it but it's not about that. It's not about that with play-based curriculum.*

> EC3: *Then I guess also the observing is the other one. So observing and watching what interests the children and that informs my program. So observing, like I mentioned before, their interest strengths and needs so that they are developing and learning the skills that they do need to learn.*

Educators considered their role at times to be more of a supportive stance – facilitating and encouraging children's learning or providing provocations within the environment to initiate this. They referred to this role as that of an instigator:

> EC1: *Instigator is one of the things that I think we do, instigate different learning through play. A supporter as well, like supporting children and encouraging children.*

> EC3: *So in some ways I think we do - we're the instigators in that way. But then we're also - like help to facilitate their learning… So it comes back to then I guess the environment and how I've set up the environment.*

Extending children's play, for one participant, was in the form of providing or adding materials.

> EC1: *I think extending as well, ways to extend on the play, and provider of materials, that's probably the other thing too. So extending on the play, or adding more things into the play, to make it go further, to extend it.*

An additional supportive role included that of planning or programming for learning through play in their settings. This involved not only careful consideration about how to structure the environment to facilitate learning but also afforded the opportunity to note patterns in how children learn. Comments included:

> EC3: T*hen we try to plan for their needs usually in a play environment… So I think we think very carefully about how to structure the play environment to help them learn.*

> EC3: *Yeah. It helps me to see patterns I think especially in children's learning.*

Documenting children's learning was another supportive behaviour mentioned by these educators. This then provided assistance for further planning and programming as well as evidence of children's learning in the form of journals, portfolios or reports. However, one participant warned of the dangers of educators becoming overly immersed in documentation to the detriment of their involvement in other aspects of their role.

> EC2: *You're documenting it and you have to document their learning…Documentation then following up on it. So you can't just leave it at that, you have to keep going.*

> EC4: *We do document the children's learning so you can track over a year what the children have been interested in and what we could extend them on and things like that. We do do learning journals.*

> EC1: *They're that engrossed in trying to record every moment and every conversation, that there's nothing else going on, that's a worry I think.*

One educator considered that her role involved flexibility. She explained that in her room, even though she programmes for a range of learning experiences for the children, she acknowledges their contributions and visions which can alter the course of play. In this way, she believed her role is to relinquish control and instead prompt or stimulate children's learning through making provisions for play.

> EC3: *I mean children have a lot of their own ideas and some days I come in [laughs] and I think I've had all these great ideas and I've planned this program and the children just take it somewhere else and that's okay.*

This educator also offered another alternative non-verbal role, that of being an effective listener. Listening for her afforded opportunities to tune into children's interests and extend their learning.

> EC3: *I think sometimes we teachers get a little bit stuck in that transmitting information role and I think we also need to take a step back, and yes we're there as a teacher, but we need to also be listening to the children so I guess it comes in the reflecting side of things and the scaffolding and their interests. But yeah I think listening is a big part of... my role and extending their learning. So I need to be able to do active listening to know what it is that they're interested in and what they're learning, how can I extend them?*

Another educator described her role as finding a "balance" between observation and interaction, knowing when to move in and out of children's play.

> EC1: *You don't always have to be involved, but I think sometimes you do need to be involved, there's that balance. It's knowing when to move in and when to move out of the play as well.*

She was also the only prior-to-school participant to explicitly refer to using a more mediating strategy, that of demonstrating:

> EC1:   *I demonstrate some tasks and skills, so demonstrate...*

Two of the interactions participants mentioned included further mediating strategies such as scaffolding and questioning. However, these were not explicitly explained or defined but applied to references of extending children's learning or to gauge their thinking. Some examples included:

EC2: *Yeah, so you're scaffolding their learning. Yeah, that's the word. Scaffolding. You're building their learning. You're the foundation… I think scaffolding says it all. You're building on what they know. You're seeing what they know and then you're building on it.*

EC3: *I guess the other thing I'd add to that is of course how we teach. So giving them like the scaffolding. So sitting with children and talking with them, questioning them about their learning or what they're doing and thinking of ways of how to extend them if that's the scenario that they're in.*

EC4: *…maybe leading slightly, but still a scaffolding, you know, the Vygotsky scaffolding. It's sort of just helping build around the child as they're learning rather than - you really want to tell them but you can't.*

EC1: *…a questioner, I like to ask the children questions, to try and extend on their thinking, also just to see what they're thinking.*

Having exhausted their deliberations on play-based pedagogy, the next research question focussed on participant views about the importance of continuity of learning and teaching in the transition process for children moving into formal schooling.

5.1.2 Research Question Two – What do prior-to-school educators believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?

Educators found it difficult to articulate their understanding of the concept of pedagogic continuity. One educator described it as a "flow" while another explained that it should be about "easing" into formal schooling.

5.1.2.1 Differing expectations

Even though they struggled to explain the term, there was collective agreement about the importance of educators considering pedagogic continuity for children entering the first school year. The acute difference in learning contexts was highlighted as a reason for the need to "smooth" children's progression by providing continuity through the transition process.

EC3: *Yes, absolutely. I think the continuity is what helps with those transitions. If there isn't any continuity it's suddenly taking one child from one context to another and they might not be prepared for it. So I think as much as we*

> *can on our end we try and prepare them but there's somewhat preparation I think from the school end.*

EC2: *Yeah, well I think that if you understand that more [pedagogic continuity], you understand the children's behaviours. You understand that they can't sit down and concentrate because they're just been from preschool where the atmosphere was very different.*

The participants expressed their concern about the abrupt difference in the expectations and demands of more formal learning on children as they enter the Kindergarten year. They identified issues that could be possible sources of challenge such as sitting at desks, using blackboards or whiteboards and listening to teachers' instructions:

EC1: *I think it's very hard for them to go from this to sitting at a desk, very formal teaching.*

EC2: *Because it's too extreme. It's the extreme of preschool and then the extreme of - and I'm not saying that the whole Kindy day is sitting down at their desk and doing stuff… But it is a very different atmosphere.*

All four strongly acknowledged that entering the first year of school entails a significant and stark change in the learning environment. Typical remarks were:

EC2: *I think just going - just Kindy because Kindy's probably one of the hardest years that a child could go through, I think, in my opinion. It is because you have gone from a preschool extreme to a Kindy extreme.*

EC4: *Yeah, yeah definitely. It is a different environment. That's what we have to be aware of. It's a totally different environment for them…*

In terms of how learning occurs in the school classroom, the educators concurred that very little crossover exists.

EC1: *I know that the school system is not based around play, which is a pity, I know it's much more formal… because it's a big difference in the environment…*

EC3: *As we see at school there are a lot of things they don't have choice in, that kind of environment and that's our understanding of what school is.*

5.1.2.2 Academic push-down

When asked to consider how they felt their teaching practices accommodated for continuity of learning when children transition they generally focused on discussing their beliefs in the importance of child readiness aspects and skill development:

> EC2:   *I just think getting the children prepared for school in a preschool is the most important thing because otherwise they're going to school next year and they're going to be surprised.*

> EC3:   *Well I mean it's the continuity of learning between the settings. So it's difficult between preschool and school. I think we try at preschool to help with that transition, to help with the continuity of learning is like I said before to have a little bit more structured group times or things, task orientated group times…*

The educator from the low SES preschool summarised it as follows:

> EC2:   *That's what we're doing. We're a preschool. We're preparing the children for school.*

Most directed their explanations to aligning practices with school-like activities or learning experiences. Introduction of more structured school-type learning featured in their responses:

> EC1:   *Definitely having some times during the day too where there is more formal teaching, like even though the majority of it is learning through play, we do have our group times which are more structured, so I think that helps definitely with easing into school too.*

> EC 2:   *I gave them my stamps and I said - and it's not something that teachers normally do is to give the children the stamps and say for every word you write you can give yourself one stamp. But because of that it was encouraging the children to come sit down and really try hard to write the words.*

> EC3:   *So the task is to play and they move through - it's hard to explain. It's easy in practice. They move through - we tend to set up numbers around the room so there might be nine activities. Usually we have 18 children so in pairs there's nine activities. We put a number with each of the activities and they're at an activity for five or 10 minutes and then we ring a bell and they need to tidy it up for the next person and move onto the next activity.*

The educator from the low SES preschool explicitly stated her belief that as transition approached, experiences for the children should reflect the type of learning that occurs in Kindergarten:

> EC2: *I'm saying... incorporating what the children do in Kindergarten… I also believe that the children should have some time where they sit down and actually concentrate on something. I know a lot of centres don't have that time for the children.*

5.1.2.3 Aspects of enhancing transition

Using a play-based approach in school was suggested by three educators as a way to help ease children into this new environment. Play-based learning was considered to be able to offer children a familiar bridge in their transition or be used as the dominant pedagogy in the first year of school.

> EC1: *I think it's really important when they first start Kindergarten you're talking to start with more of a play based learning approach, I think that's really important to have that continuity. I don't know if it happens at a lot of schools, but to have that continuity, and then to gradually ease into the more formalised teaching…*

> EC2: *So I think that having a Kindy class which is a lot more informal and a lot more - maybe not so much play-based. I think play is important for kindies but like a happy medium. So have some play and then some learning stations and then have that intentional half an hour of teaching.*

> EC4: *…but that's what I would like to see. Yeah a lot more of that [liaising], and the play-based curriculum in the kindergarten year.*

Three educators expressed views of the need to improve the transition process by addressing communication avenues between the two settings and felt that this was important when considering pedagogic continuity. According to one educator, a substantial void currently existed and the sharing of information would enhance stronger linkages, whilst another believed that this could be addressed with more opportunities for liaising and shared visits:

> EC3: *But it would be good if there was more exchanging of information to aid in that continuity of learning. I think that's the big hole at the moment. We do lots on our side to help with the continuity and then the schools do a bit*

> *on their side but there's no actual crossing over. There is some I have to - sorry there's not no crossing over, there's some. But it is I guess limited.*

EC4: *I would like to see more liaising and I think that that is probably - I've only been in this community a small - so I think I can make excuses, but I think it's true… Well I would also like that they come here… just come and see them in this natural environment and how they are, I think that would be great… I'm sure all of us would love to liaise a lot more than we do. I'm sure we would. We're all open to it, but it's just finding the time and resources and money.*

They believed that teachers in schools should recognise and have an understanding of children's prior learning in preschools and that there is a need to transfer and share that information when children transition to school. For example:

EC1: *Yeah very important. I think they need to look at where they've come from. I think they need to take on board some of the things that we say as well, because there doesn't seem to be a lot of flow between services and the schools. I do send along a fairly comprehensive summary of each child… and I do hope that the teachers take that on board as well, just to provide that continuity so that when they do start school, the teachers know where they're coming from.*

EC4: *I'd like to see that we eventually have that transition to school where schools would read our reports…We do spend a lot of time on our reports…I don't know, but we'd like to - I think our [profession] would like to feel that primary teachers aren't starting at square one if they read our reports.*

One educator expressed that this was a challenging endeavour – trying to gauge how much information the school required.

EC3: *It's kind of that grey area of I don't know how much information they really want from me. I would love to give them as much information as possible to make this transition easier on the child because I think it is a very stressful time.*

Participants were also encouraged to reflect on and respond to interview questions about perceived influencing factors associated with their decisions to implement a play-based approach in their rooms. This was explored within their responses in the following section.

5.1.3   Research Question Three – What factors influence prior-to-school educators'
decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?

5.1.3.1 Intrinsic factors

The participants expressed a range of personal reasons as factors that influence their decision to implement play-based pedagogy in their room. As they reflected, it became clear that their reasons were not limited to just one feature but were a combination of many. Some pondered that it was a personal belief that motivates this decision but this was often shaped by other contributing aspects such as personal experience and/or their educational qualifications and theoretical knowledge. This is illustrated in comments such as:

> EC2:   *I think it's more my belief. In saying that, my belief has been changed a lot from working here… I think it's my beliefs as well but I think that a lot of my beliefs have stemmed off what she [the director] tells me and what I see in the centre and how I see them playing with the children.*

> EC3:   *So I guess the factors would be my knowledge as an early childhood teacher, my studies of what I know the benefits of play are…Well I mean my personal belief I do know that. Yeah my personal belief, I believe children learn through play. But my personal belief is of course informed through my studies and through my reading and how I feel children learn… I see children learning in that context so I know as an early childhood teacher from my years of experience that play is a very powerful learning tool. So I guess it's through my experiences as well.*

> EC1:   *Seeing that it does work, getting the feedback that families are very happy, the children are doing really well at school, and just seeing the children's involvement in the program and the high level of learning that happens from their involvement in the program.*

One participant specified that in regards to personal experience, her recorded observations of children's play are an essential component in confirming her beliefs in play-based pedagogy.

> EC3:   *But I guess my observations do contribute to my play-based learning. So-and-so might need help with a social conflict and how to deal with social conflicts and the best way to do that is through allowing them to play and finding those teachable moments in those situations where we can scaffold or model.*

Educators gave specific examples within their range of experience that described for them the benefits of children learning through play or explained how it validated that this is children's preferred mode of learning.

> EC1: *That's what I get really thrilled about, is when you see - and it might be something that's totally not come from anything I'd planned, but something that they started, and you've built on and built on and built on, and seeing the learning that happens with that, I think that's fantastic… Things like that to me, that happens in a play-based learning program, whereas a more structured learning program, I don't think that sort of opportunity comes up.*

> EC2: *It's what the children want. It's what they're interested in. It's what they want to do, and you can't force a child to do something they don't want to do. I think that's part of the reason why it's been so successful as well.*

But for one educator who was not long out of her tertiary studies, she reflected that is was her lack of experience that could be a possible negative factor.

> EC2: *I'm my own obstacle, really. I think my ignorance, my lack of knowledge. I feel like I don't know. I still have so much to learn. I still have so much to know and learn about that…*

5.1.3.2 Extrinsic factors

When asked to think of any other factors that could influence their decisions, the prior-to-school educators stated a number of external elements. An external barrier that was cited was the physical environment. Even though this may not necessarily be an obstacle in their setting, educators reflected that this could prove to be a potential consideration in other services. They suggested that building design and access to play environments could affect supervisory responsibilities and how play is offered.

> EC1: *I was just thinking the physical environment, but our environment's set up really well for that, so it's not really an obstacle for us, but it would be probably for other services.*

> EC3: *Our environment because of the building that we're in we can't really do a lot of indoor/outdoor play and I think that crossing over between those two contexts is really important for children. But the way our service is set up*

> *it's just not possible supervision wise and structurally. So I guess to me that's one thing.*

Organisational or structural barriers also featured in their narratives. Three educators voiced time as a constraint in the implementation of play-based learning. In order for children to deeply engage in play or be able to follow through with their ideas, the educators believed that without extended periods of time this could not be achieved.

EC1: *Probably time as well really, time in that they do need to have big blocks of time in order to engage in play. The way your day is organised, you have to have big blocks of time, because otherwise they'd never get fully involved.*

EC3: *Yeah I think that time has a big difference on that. I've worked in a couple of centres where it is lots of rush, rush, rush and children did get quite frustrated at the fact of they didn't quite get to finish that thought. So whatever they were doing they obviously had a thought of what they were trying to accomplish or achieve and I could see the frustration.*

Time also featured in their descriptions of routines. Compared to long day care services, the shorter hours offered in preschools meant that educators believed personal care routines took up considerable stretches of the day or intruded into children's play agendas. By comparison, one participant explained that even though her service was increasing operational hours, she reasoned this left less time for educators to organise resources for play or to prepare the environment.

EC3: *I guess the other one is routines I think here… The children are only here 9:00 till 3:00 and they have to have morning tea and lunch and wash their hands. There's all these things that I think interrupt their play but no, they need to eat or they need to go to the toilet [laughs]. All these things.*

EC4: *Our routine's changing from, we were traditionally 9:00 to 3:00 preschool this year. We'll go to 8:30 to 3:30 next year so we're adding another hour onto our day. That will change things like how we set up and all of that sort of thing, because it will mean staff have less time to prepare. So that affects what we will put out and how resourceful or how prepared we are.*

A shared passion and philosophy of play-based pedagogy among staff members was important for two of the educators. They spoke of working as a team towards a common goal of fostering children's learning through play.

> EC1: *I think too I'm fortunate that all my staff are very passionate about play-based as well. But a lot of the staff, we all started together here, so it's been really great to do that, work towards that together.*

> EC2: *All the staff, not just the director. But yeah all the staff… so you kind of take on what the other staff want to do as well.*

For one participant, the support of a national curriculum statement was a central factor that underpinned her core beliefs and practice in play-based pedagogy. She regarded the *EYLF* as a valuable document that helps champion educators' choices to families as to why they adopt a play-based approach in their settings.

> EC1: *We have to really put a lot of emphasis on it and educate our families about why we're doing it, and in that way the EYLF has been fantastic, because I can say to them this is a nationwide curriculum, and it is a play-based learning curriculum…That's been really good to back us up with what we're doing, because that's what it's all about.*

Others pointed out that being part of a larger umbrella organisation, whose underlying philosophy is a play-based approach, further validates their fundamental beliefs and motivation to use play as a medium for learning.

> EC1: *Really does help yeah, it helps because it's got the history, the reputation, and that is the approach that [name], that's their philosophy as well, so it definitely does help, rather than being a standalone service.*

> EC4: *[name], our organisation… Yes. They're great, they're fantastic.*

The educator from the low SES service highlighted financial constraints within their service impacting on the type of play experiences that could be offered to the children there. Families struggled to fulfil their fee commitments and this resulted in fewer funds for purchasing much-needed resources.

> EC2: *Of course, funding for our centre… For resources, yeah. Like there's a lot that we can't do because we don't have the money to do it. A lot of the parents don't pay their fees…*

Additionally, she also reflected that as children transition into the Kindergarten year, staff ratios change dramatically and so financial restrictions within schools meant that teachers were often dealing with much larger groups of children on their

own, without the assistance of additional staff, leaving fewer opportunities for individual time with the children.

> EC2: *Children go from 3 staff to 30 kids or three staff to less children to one staff, 1 teacher to 30 kids and I think that's really difficult for the Kindy teacher as well… I think that's also an important thing if the funding is there to be able to do that one on one. I think that's important for the children this age.*

With regard to attitudinal factors, all of the participants acknowledged parental attitudes as a potential obstacle. Three participants specified parental expectations as a hindrance to the implementation of play-based pedagogy in early childhood settings, but not necessarily in their own centre. In some instances, educators discussed parental aspirations for children's academic achievement or concerns for school readiness whilst others mentioned parental misconceptions of play-based learning. However, educators viewed this as timely opportunities to inform and educate families about this approach in order to illuminate children's learning.

> EC1: *So I have to explain to them [parents] why it is different, and why we do what we do. It is really important to explain that, and I'm also honest with them about, because they always ask about the school readiness program, do you do stencils and colouring in? I'm like no, no, and I have to explain why we don't do that, and what we do instead of that.*

> EC3: *I think what we talked a little bit about before is sometimes parents. Not always but sometimes there are different parent expectations… So we say to parents you might think they're just playing but we can see they're developing their maths knowledge or their science, they're hypothesising what might happen next or their social skills.*

> EC4: *I mean it is about educating parents… but it's that expectation, is the parent expecting a piece of work or their photo on the computer in the foyer at the end of the day? So yes, that does affect the way you have it. But I think that's our role, to educate them about what your child's being involved in.*

Additionally, the educator in the low SES service revealed that in her setting, it was not a matter of pedagogical debates or approaches but that parents show little regard for the work of early childhood educators. In fact she explained it is a struggle to even build relationships with them.

> EC2: *The parents have nothing - like they come in, the drop the child off, they leave. They don't want anything to do with us. They don't want anything -*

143

we've tried to create a relationship… But the parents that I'm talking about, they don't want any of that. They don't want to deal with you. You look after their child. You are their child's babysitter and that's all they see you as. They don't see you as an educator. They don't see you as someone that's getting their child ready for school. They just see you as someone they can put their child with so that they can go home, enjoy their day, and then come back.

Perceptions of early childhood education were a premise that was also present in the response of one educator who further reflected that such issues lie beyond the beliefs of families and included community and political spheres as well. She stressed that she believed it was important to advocate for play-based pedagogy so that community attitudes could change, as well as influencing perceptions at a national government level.

EC4:   *I believe that we need to educate more of the community of what a play-based curriculum looks like, because I still have families who come here and say, my child's in long day care and all they do is play. I think, oh god where do I start? [Laughs]. So it's about educating the community as well, about a play based curriculum… They are obstacles that you have to help people overcome, and it can be politicians and it can be a lot of outside forces that don't really understand what a play-based curriculum is all about… I don't know, I'm not disillusioned, I'm still a strong advocate for early childhood, but it still surprises me that we haven't gone very far with educating the community and politicians and I mean, don't get me started on the current government about education. They don't see that this is a valuable form of education.*

5.2   Case Report Two - Kindergarten Teachers

5.2.1   Research Question One – How do Kindergarten teachers view play-based pedagogy and how do they describe their role in play-based pedagogy?

Explanations highlighted the variety of meanings that teachers in schools hold about their understandings of play-based learning and teaching. Three school participants identified that they use different terminology to describe play-based pedagogy: one teacher explained that at her school it is called open-ended learning, another referred to it as developmental play whilst a third described it as free roaming.

> PT2: *So we actually call it open-ended learning.*
>
> PT3: *We call it developmental play, but they always go, yay, it's developmental play day.*
>
> PT4: *We call it free roaming, they could free roam, they could do what they wanted when they wanted.*

A fourth teacher defined her understanding of play-based pedagogy as used in schools was that it looks very different to how it is implemented in an early childhood environment.

> PT4: *I think it's very different in a primary setting and probably not as much based around play-based learning as in an early childhood setting.*

She continued to explain her perception of how she considered play-based pedagogy was realised in her classroom:

> PT4: *What I did at that table the first day of kindergarten was I would say in a way play-based. Those children would come to me and they'd colour in or they'd do something simple… It was probably more aligned to what they were used to in a pre-school setting.*

5.2.1.1 Play as active exploration

The teachers revealed broad descriptions of more traditional conceptualisations of play when asked to provide explanations for the term 'play as a medium for learning'. Active engagement, as opposed to passivity, was identified as a fundamental element by the participants. One such example included:

> PT1: *So I do a lot of that kind of get up and be active. To me that playing is when they're getting up and being active. Not just sitting there listening to me. I do a lot of get up and let's do things and let's go outside and do something.*

Only two considered play-based learning as effective and operational in their classrooms (one from the low EAL school and the other with the EC qualification) but this was not the dominant pedagogy used. Overall, when teachers thought about how play-based learning was used in the classrooms, they expressed ideas about how children come to interpret and understand their world. In their

descriptions they noted the exploratory nature of play and that children construct knowledge through direct, first-hand experiences.

> PT1: *So to me that's play, when they do that self-discovery. I guess I think that more of as play, in as part of it being a self-discovery kind of thing.*

> PT2: *Yes, because they need that extra medium, they need to touch things. It has to be tactile, they need to be able to move and explore things.*

> PT3: *Well, play can play a massive part in the children's learning because it's hands-on. It's relevant to them. It's age appropriate and it's just a good way for them to learn effectively through activities and hands-on things for them to build on.*

Another agreed that these opportunities enable children to explore autonomously without the support of an adult:

> PT2: *So just giving them the opportunity to explore it for themselves as opposed to being very directed.*

One teacher explained her perceived view of what play-based pedagogy entailed in preschools as described to her by others. She explained it as follows:

> PT1: *My idea of what happens at preschool - and this is only from what parents have told me, or what the children have said - is that, oh if they didn't want to come and do that bit of work they didn't have to… they didn't have to do anything at all. They could just get up and go if they wanted as well. Well to me that's not teaching.*

5.2.1.2 Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy

In relation to this category, peer collaboration was the only theme that featured in the responses of two Kindergarten teachers.

> PT2: *You just watch the connection that they make with each other and the explanations that come out and that peer reinforcement of different things…*

> PT3: *Again, that group stuff. So they're not just on their own, they're working together…*

From the discussions and deliberations of the school teachers, a new category was identified within the findings for research question one as presented below.

5.2.1.3 Limited place for play

It became evident that finding a dominant place for play-based pedagogy in the academic school setting had its challenges. Issues arose in terms of constraining limitations and in the perceptions of Kindergarten teachers.   Participants highlighted that play in the formal schooling environment looked different and they struggled for it to be located within the school curriculum. Three of the Kindergarten teachers referred to using play in the form of educational games and that they believed these are what most engage the children and make learning fun. Furthermore, they explained that these constituted episodes where play is employed as an aid to support explicit teaching or used to facilitate the development of deeper meaning.

> PT1:   *As a medium for learning I do use a lot of game - educational based games - in my class. I think children are more engaged when they're playing it as a game…. But before we do the game I will have done explicit teaching.*

> PT2:   *They want to play reading games, they want to play maths, all those sort of things. I need to tap into that. If I remove what I teach from that, from what's familiar, for what engages them, they're not going to learn. I need to use what connects them and gets them into the work… I've got heaps and heaps of games and part of that is just the fact that I've been doing this for a while.*

> PT3:   *We do lots of maths games… We do lots of card games and board games… We do lots of dice games with them adding up the dice, so that's another thing, a way we use play, and the kids don't even know that they're learning. They're just having so much fun they think they're just having fun, but they're actually doing a lot of learning as well.*

Some discussed this as free time or as play that is offered at the end of the day when children were tired:

> PT3:   *So in term 1, again like I said before, we do, do a lot of creative free play, so they're in the home corner, there's not like a focus…Plus they're so tired in term 1. By the afternoon they need a bit of free time…*

> PT1:   *I do give them free time in the classroom. So if they've finished their work and that, they can go and read a book, they can get out the shape blocks and make some patterns for me. There's things in my room that I allow them to do when they finish.*

Even when the school teachers recognised the value of play, implementation was restricted into rationed periods of the school day or within adult-led structure:

> PT1: *Well I believe it does have a place, I do. But it still needs to be in a structure. I think children like to have a structure; they like to know what they're doing as well.*

> PT3: *So even the play I provide I feel it's too structured again for the way I believe play should be, but again to meet those outcomes that I'm required to do through the syllabus I have to do it that way.*

They also lamented that in a school context it was not able to be offered as they envisaged or had to be implemented differently. The participant with the EC qualification illustrated this point by offering that within the confines of the organisation of the school system, it is difficult to offer true play-based learning as a dominant pedagogy throughout the school day:

> PT3: *So it's quite structured play which is also - in a school context I don't think you can get away from that…but to meet the outcomes of the syllabus and what our unit of work wants it is quite structured…I would actually like to incorporate play a bit more in the program, but I just find it really hard to do when you've got so many other areas of outcomes you need to meet in school.*

Two of the Kindergarten teachers articulated personal beliefs that the use of a play-based approach was not an effective pedagogy or was almost absent in the Kindergarten year.

> PT1: *As far as just playing and learning through play, I don't think that works as in so much as what we have to achieve. When it comes to really learning their sounds, learning their sight words, learning how to write, learning how to form their letters I believe it needs explicit teaching. It can be followed up by games, but I think you have to do that explicit teaching as well.*

> PT4: *There is no structured planning and programming around play-based learning and the more we develop into the year and the more children have settled into school routines, that is non-existent.*

The teacher from the high EAL setting focused on the culture of accountability in her school. She emphasised the difficulty of realising a play-based approach amidst her school's rigorously set literacy and numeracy targets which is the focus of her teaching.

> PT4: At *a school level particularly in a school that's low socioeconomic where you have children that are already coming to school disadvantaged, there really are a lot of departmental initiatives that we've taken on board to boost children's literacy and numeracy skills… as a teacher in a school serving low socioeconomic students and with a school with a set target and agenda I've really aligned my teaching practices to that.*

Despite expressing a personal belief in the importance of play, these participants reflected on the limitations of being able to implement play-based learning within an outcomes driven curriculum. Three of the school teachers articulated explicit beliefs that the use of play-based learning was not effective or achievable with regards to meeting curriculum outcomes. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> PT2: *I think it's really important but I also know it gets lost in the business of everything else. I know that you're going to hear so many people that will say to you 'crowded curriculum', the shift even of what you're supposed to be achieving in kindergarten - it often is one of those things that the time gets minimised or you do less of it [play].*

These Kindergarten teachers expressed that play exists within short transition-to-school phases, on the fringes of the school day or ensues as an enriching activity after explicit teaching. Play-based learning is squeezed to fit somewhere into the busy schedule of academic instruction. One teacher viewed the position for play-based learning within the school context as being limited to certain curriculum areas.

> PT4: *The play-based approach I don't think is at the forefront of what I do as a teacher. If I do do it it's number one to transition children from pre-school into school… If it fits into drama it fits in but other than that it doesn't and my reason for that is that we do have specific targets and goals that we need to achieve with regards to learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and that is really what's guiding me.*

She continued to explain that;

> PT4: *After we have our transition and we settle into our school…there are still opportunities for them to be individual but it's not as play-based as it can be.*

5.2.1.4 Roles of the educator in play-based pedagogy

The Kindergarten teachers described a narrower scope of supportive roles whilst their descriptions of mediating behaviours signified more direct interventionist or explicit teaching strategies. With regard to supportive responsibilities, a preference for more non-interactionist roles such as that of an observer or guide in children's play became evident in the statements of three of the teachers. Their explanations described more passive elements such as supervisory responsibilities or being available to acknowledge children's accomplishments.

> PT3: *A guide, but I would also be an observer rather than - because I like it to be child directed. If it's child directed it's more meaningful to them. So yeah, I would obviously be there as a - for safety reasons I would be there to supervisor or whatever…*

> PT2: *In open-ended learning I am more the observer. I'm very conscious of I don't want to lead what they're doing. I want them to guide it… More so as the observer, I am stepping back and watching different social interactions as well… I'm stepping back. Unfortunately it's not a time where I sit and go, tap, tap, tap at the computer and work, it really is just a walking around the room. They want to show you stuff as well. It's nice for them to just stop you and go this is what I've done.*

Some teachers expressed their guidance role was to help steer children toward the understanding of a concept in order to assist them in realising an outcome or to stay on topic.

> PT1: *Well I guess it's just that if someone isn't quite getting it right, I could actually guide them along a little bit more. So it is a guidance one as well.*

> PT3: *So there's an adult there that will guide them through it so they are focusing on that topic… they're redirecting them so to speak if they've gone off.*

In terms of mediating behaviours, explaining featured strongly in participant responses. Teachers considered it important to provide structure in the form of explanations or instructions so that children clearly understood what needed to be achieved or the purpose of the play activity.

> PT2: *When we do play, we set the activities out and we explain this might be a writing activity or look at this, this Lego, you can also while you're playing maybe count the bricks or see if you can make a pattern for me.*

150

> PT1:   *But I think I need to give them that structure of what it is I want them to actually be looking for... I think my role is to actually give them an expectation of what it is - or at least an explanation of what it is - I'd like them to do out there and a structure to bring it back and explain it to the rest of the class.*

Questioning was also used mainly to provide structure prior to children exploring a concept through play to help ensure that learning objectives are achieved. One such example is:

> PT1:   *I have started questioning them before we even go out as to what they - or even, what do you think we might find out there? What do you think you'll be looking for? So we've done a lot of that preamble before we go out there, so that when we get out there they also have a very clear idea.*

Three of the teachers referred to joining in children's play as co-players. Two described these as more spontaneous roles where their involvement was not with the intention of teaching. Teachers take cues from the children and believe it is important to respect children's deep engagement or their sense of agency.

> PT2:   *The expectation is if I'm with their little shop game I am a customer or I am doing whatever, I let them guide me as opposed to me as the adult coming in and telling them how they must behave… So either watching or being totally immersed as a character but not directing or telling them what to do.*

> PT3:   *Also sometimes I like to be part of the actual play, like what would you call that?... Yeah, getting involved, but sometimes I find the kids actually get a bit embarrassed if you're there. If I have come into the home corner they'll stop, which that's also not such a great thing because I find I've interrupted their beautiful play and their creative play.*

The third teacher (from the high EAL school) considered her involvement as a co-player was more instructional and needed to be linked to direct learning objectives.

> PT4:   *I really do think about what it is. I start with my outcome and what I'm achieving as a teacher and then I will break it down. Unless there's a direct link to learning I never do things just for the fun of doing things. For me as an educator I have a purpose and I do need to have a strong focus on that. That's at the forefront of whatever I do…*

She continued to explain that when drama play experiences have been incorporated into her teaching, she has been able to become involved in children's play but for the purpose of directing towards intended outcomes.

> PT4: *I could take on a role with them; I could be part of the play-based experience myself. It allows you more scope in that way... I think as a teacher you know the direction that you want to go in and you just use those as vehicles to get you to an end point...*

Only the early childhood trained Kindergarten teacher referred to her role as being that of a "scaffolder" (PT3) and did not provide any further explanation of what this entailed in children's learning.

5.2.2 Research Question Two – What do Kindergarten teachers believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?

Pedagogic continuity proved to be an intangible notion to define for these teachers as well. Definitions centred on aspects of communication and building relationships or on orientation initiatives but few were able to clearly explain this in relation to a focus on pedagogy. Some examples included:

> PT2: *Some of the preschools around here have been trying to work with us to do this - starting to implement certain things before school... on our transition day we invite the preschools as well as the individuals. So the preschools will often come down and be part of a science fair, book parade, all those sorts of things.*

> PT3: *So yeah, that's my understanding of it, just being able to have that character of the person, who they are, not just from preschool, but the person they are and then be able to continue it and build on it through the school, especially their first year of school where it must be extremely daunting for the little ones.*

One teacher expressed her struggle to articulate what this concept meant:

> PT3: *Yeah, just to continue the approach of learning that they have in the preschool into the school. It's something I find isn't done in schools, which would be a good thing, but yeah, I'm not really sure how to answer that one, my understanding of the continuity of it.*

Another echoed the words of one of the prior-to-school educators in relation to continuity being about the idea of flow through without any specific reference to pedagogy but with mention of curriculum:

PT2:   *Flow through. You'd almost want it to be seamless. I know it's not… But I would say to answer your question initially flowing through, just seamlessly flowing through. That's where perhaps the national curriculum coming into play and the early years thing coming into play more and more over the next few years hopefully will create a platform for that to happen.*

All but one Kindergarten teacher did agree however, that in their personal view they felt it is important to consider continuity of learning for children's transition to formal schooling. Their discussion of the significance of this related to a more overall concept of transition in general. They made reference to how this impacts on children's ability to succeed throughout their schooling:

PT3:   *I think in Kindergarten I always say it's like laying the foundation of a house and then you go from Kindy Year 1 up to Year 6 and if the foundations aren't right then the house isn't going to be able to stay up. So I feel if you can get it right in Kindy and they have a good positive start to school then they're going to learn and succeed through school. So yeah, I think it's very important.*

PT2:   *Totally, because the first year I think is highly underrated by a lot of people. If we don't get it right now they get to Year 2, they crumble.*

5.2.2.1 Differing expectations

There was agreement that minimal continuity and crossover occurs from one setting to the next. Teachers felt that children experience an immense change and a noticeable difference in the move between the two contexts but that continuity could be improved. This is illustrated in comments such as:

PT1:   *Unfortunately that is, it just seems to be there is a huge cut off. I think this is what, when we were chatting with the preschools at that course I went to and it's just like, that was preschool [clap] this is school. There is no crossover. That's just part of it. That's just the way it is unfortunately [laughs].*

PT4   *To go from here to there I think there's just a big step… I don't think there is a continuity I would say. I think there could be a better continuity and a more successful continuity…*

This teacher also expressed that she believed there was a lack of knowledge of the teaching cultures in each context in order to develop a shared understanding of continuity:

> PT4   *As a community I don't think that we know enough about what each of us do to be able to have a shared understanding of where we're both going as educators.*

The sharp disparity between the two educational contexts was also acknowledged by these teachers. They spoke about the noticeable change to more structured, formal instruction and the differing learning expectations in the classroom.

> PT1:   *The expectations - from what I gather talking to the preschool teachers - our expectations are so far apart for the children. I do, I think there's this big leap that children are then expected to make.*

> PT2:   *In terms of continuity I actually think the end of the pre-schooling environment and coming to school is a harsh difference. They come in here, it looks inviting but it doesn't look fun the way a preschool does if that makes sense… Then there's like well you're done, welcome to the school, it's books, it's chairs, it's the floor, that's it. This is your learning space. It's very structured. The expectations - I'm saying you need to sit still, you need to look at me, you need to be listening, you've got to be engaged.*

The teacher from the high SES school believed that pedagogic continuity was not an important issue when children transition from preschool. She explained that for her, learning in Kindergarten is very different from the early childhood environment and this is something that is just accepted within that process:

> PT1:   *No. I think when they come to school it's school. Yeah. I think what they do at preschool is lovely for preschool, but when they come to school we need to go, okay now you're at school. We often do say to them - I use the phrase, now you're at big school, this is what you do here.*

Not all made connections between play and learning. Together with the teacher from the high EAL school, these two participants expressed their belief that play and learning were separate constructs:

> PT1:   *But when they get here we can't just have them running in and out all over the place…I think that is what school is about. It's not preschool, it's not playing, it's learning.*

PT1: *I think it is also my belief that now they're at school and they come to school to learn. I don't think play - I think play can as I've said before - it can help enhance their learning, but you need to do the explicit instruction first.*

PT4: *Well when I think pedagogy continuity and I had defined it as that learning, and I'm not talking about play, I'm talking about literacy and numeracy, that is important.*

5.2.2.2 Academic push-down

School readiness attributes also surfaced in their descriptions of key considerations for pedagogic continuity across the transition process. Participants identified characteristics such as children's readiness to learn or possessing a particular skill set as useful qualities when entering school.

PT1: *I think they have to be ready to learn…If they're sending them to school that child is meant to be grown up. I know they're only five, I accept they're five, I understand a five year old…But I want them to learn to be responsible and they do have to be independent and they need to be curious and ready to learn. They, I think, are my three main things that I think.*

PT2: *What should a Kindy child or what should a child who's five or coming to school - because I've got kids that still are not five - what should their skill set or what could their skill set look like prior to school?*

The NSW *Best Start* assessment featured in all their responses and each teacher advocated its effectiveness in terms of gauging children's current knowledge or skill level. Teachers considered this a beneficial and expeditious tool for gathering information and identifying children's existing understandings in order to help shape their own teaching.

PT1: *It is very important because that's why we do the Best Start assessment… So I need to know where these children are when they come to school - which is why we do that Best Start assessment - so that I can continue their learning.*

PT2: *Best Start helps. It has been really good. Prior to having the Best Start assessment tool you really would just meet your group and spend the first three or four weeks looking at how they reacted, what they can do, putting stuff in front, hit or miss if you like…So that, in itself, has been good because you do get a better picture of where little groups of kids are at. From day one you can start to take into account their needs.*

For the teacher from the low SES school, continuity of learning did not include the idea of learning through play. She believed in a strong emphasis on transference of academic skills, particularly targeting literacy and numeracy. However, she did acknowledge that there was room for improving the overall effectiveness of the transition passage which could include the introduction of formal schooling when children are older.

> PT4: *We're advocates for that [starting formal schooling later] and we're campaigning to have that done but unless there's reform on a bigger scale I think you're kind of stuck in what you can do in schools… If I'm to define my understanding of it I would want it to be more of a smoother transition going in from early childhood into your kindergarten or your regular school setting. It would be a transition. How successful that transition is or how much better it can be, that's still up in the air but that's my understanding.*

Teachers also highlighted the push-down effect of the "crammed curriculum" and how this impacted on their considerations of continuity as the pressure to meet academic expectations were immense and affected their ability to find time or space to include play. Consequently, less time for play resulted:

> PT1: *Now we've got this new English curriculum that we have to get our heads around. It's telling us that we have to teach kindergartens oh, what noun groups are and verbs. I'm going, huh are you serious?*

> PT2: *The curriculum is quite busy too…*

> PT3: T*he pressure that you have as a teacher on all the things we have to meet… Then obviously the pressure comes onto the teachers and I just feel there needs to be more opportunity for them to play… it is a lot of pressure and there's only six hours in the day.*

One teacher simply summed it up as:

> PT1: *The fact that I don't use it [play] is more the fact that I have to get - it is actually the crammed curriculum that we have. That's why I don't use it. Mm, I think that's the simple answer [laughs].*

5.2.2.3 Aspects of enhancing transition

In order to ameliorate for this distinct contrast in learning contexts, the participants explained that they provide continuity in terms of play experiences, more so at the beginning of the school year and sometimes only for a period of a few weeks. The teachers believed these types of experiences aligned with prior-to-school pedagogies, provided a familiar bridge and eased the transition to more formal learning.

> PT2: *At the start of each year myself and our team - in some ways we step back from the academic focus for the first two or three weeks… In that time it's kind of easing in… we do recognise that if we were to walk in day one and say sit down, cross your legs, write your name, do this, it's not going to work. They don't have that context. So the first few weeks - in some ways I think we try to model what we think preschool may have been and try to ease into that a little bit more.*

> PT3: *So yeah, so then with the play sort of thing in Kindergarten, like I said, term 1 we do a lot of play in the afternoon.*

> PT4: *At the beginning of the year you do have opportunities because you haven't actually started your formal program but as the year goes on that really doesn't occur… We probably sing more and dance more and do more things that are early childhood than I would be doing now… it looked very, very different to what our classroom looks like now and our classroom now will look very different next term once children have those skills. It was probably more aligned to what they were used to in a pre-school setting.*

As with the prior-to-school educators, all agreed that communication exchange could be targeted as a mode to improving pedagogic continuity. They identified that professional dialogue with their prior-to-school colleagues is lacking and proposed the need to either obtain information about children's learning or offer ideas for school readiness. In most instances, these suggestions were of unidirectional communication rather than a bidirectional or collaborative approach.

> PT1: *I don't think there's a lot of continuity that happens. I think that's because there is no conversation between us. That we don't converse with them, they don't converse with us.*

> PT2: *So we are all feeding off the same preschools and yet we've never all sat down and said… We've never actually sat down with the preschools or the*

> *childcare centres and said we'd really appreciate it if, before school, you X, Y, Z.*

Whilst teachers articulated a desire to improve communication, one participant captured the organisational struggles that teachers in schools are faced with in relation to finding opportunities to visit preschools and be able to construct an understanding of the learning environment from which their new school entrants come.

> PT1: *No, because I actually don't know what they do at preschool. It's a bit sad isn't it, but I don't know what they do at preschool. It's hard, when am I going to go to a preschool? I'm teaching here five days a week, when am I going to go to a preschool to see what they're doing?*

Matching the responses of the prior-to-school educators, recognition of children's prior learning experiences in early childhood settings also featured in their suggestions or considerations for enhancing continuity. They explained that such information would provide a useful starting point upon which to build on children's prior knowledge in order to continue their learning into the first year of school.

> PT3: *Being able to have a good understanding, even an information sheet about each individual…So you're able to continue that approach to the learning that they've already experienced, otherwise all that stuff they've learnt probably at preschool would just go out the window if they come into school and it's all just left.*

> PT4: *I think the dialogue can happen the other way where we could find out where their starting point is, where are they now within the early childhood setting, what skills do they have and what we can do to support those skills? Because when I see children coming into kindergarten and we do our Best Start assessment pretty much within the second week of school, children already come to school with a lot of skills. Rather than assume what they don't have we need to find out what they do have.*

The school participants also pondered about influencing factors and obstacles to their decision-making with regard to implementation of play-based pedagogy in their classrooms.

5.2.3   Research Question Three – What factors influence Kindergarten teachers' decisions related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?

5.2.3.1 Intrinsic factors

Only two Kindergarten teachers referred to personal elements. One expressed her personal belief that learning begins when children commence school and that play was more of an adjunct activity.

> PT1:   *I don't think play - I think play can as I've said before - it can help enhance their learning, but you need to do the explicit instruction first.*

The other spoke of length of personal experience and her mind-set. Whilst she was an accomplished teacher herself, she reflected that for a newly graduated teacher, taking on a play-based approach in which you entrust control over to the children could be comparatively challenging for some.

> PT2:   *Experience. Early scheme teachers - that's quite confronting to step back, it's loud, you're not in control. You have to give that locus of control to the students and step back. That's a big deal when you're first couple of years out, to acknowledge that that's productive noise.*

She continued to explain that she also factored in her emotional state:

> PT2:   *… my patience and tolerance on the day. If I'm being completely honest that's a bigger factor than the first one because I can always figure out a way to re-teach it in a different way. If they're off the planet, if I'm tired and cross it's never going to work. So then sometimes you just don't do it. There you go, that's as honest as you're going to get.*

5.2.3.2 Extrinsic factors

Extrinsic factors featured heavily in the responses to the two interview questions related to this focus. The environment was a significant obstacle for three of the Kindergarten teachers in relation to the size of their classrooms and also the ratio of students to teachers who can fit into that space. In a school, this simply restricted possibilities for providing adequate provisions for play. They expressed:

> PT1:   *I don't have the room set up. I don't have a big enough room set up I think… So you could have corners of your room. I don't even have a dressing up corner or anything like that. Where would I put that in my room?... The rooms aren't big enough… You just can't - you actually cannot do it. You drive yourself insane doing it.*

> PT2:   *Physical space… I know that some schools who don't necessarily have every - they're few and far between now, but might have a spare classroom. Well, I've seen them set up beautiful play spaces, it's just for play. Bit jealous of that because that would just be the ultimate, that you could walk into this fairy tale beautiful space.*

> PT3:   *Also the environment sometimes I find can be an obstacle. So having 26 kids sometimes is a huge obstacle.*

Overwhelmingly, all the teachers targeted school directives and accountability pressures as constraints. Quite simply, teachers expressed that the current, intense demands of meeting syllabus outcomes and ensuring that children were achieving expected academic skills could not be achieved through the use of play. Reaching targets, collecting assessment data and attaining specific cognitive competencies featured in their responses such as:

> PT1:   *I think my biggest - we've got to reach targets. We have to get them to this reading level by the end of this, we have to get these many sight words by the end of term one. We have to do to this, we've got all these targets which are set for us; all this data. We've got to get the kids there and you can't get them there by letting them just play.*

> PT3:   *The pressure that you have as a teacher on all the things we have to meet… Just there's so much, the amount of outcomes the children have to learn…*

> PT4:   *The school targets. The school targets and we're really, really focused on those.*

Another external barrier for the teachers was that of time. This was explained in relation to finding time to squeeze play in between additional learning programs and the key learning areas.

> PT2:   *Time. Time is probably a big factor. We have a lot of extra programs, they're all very valid, very important but then the time that you have with your students in your classroom - you know, fitting play into the curriculum when you are already trying to fit in seven other key learning areas. So then trying to deliberately make links doesn't always happen.*

PT3:   *Time is always a big one… The only obstacle would be the time, but again if I was a bit more creative I could probably… make my whole day through a play-based approach.*

Teachers often referred to timetabling issues and academic expectations of the school curriculum to further emphasise the strains they felt existed at present within an overcrowded, content-driven program in the Kindergarten year. One such example is:

PT1:   *The timetable is so jam packed that I sometimes - we just look at it and go, how can we fit all this in?*

Two participants (one from high SES and one from high EAL) suggested that the lack of clear and explicit explanations in syllabus documents about how the use of play would directly meet or improve expected school learning outcomes impedes its implementation in their classrooms.

PT2:   *The curriculum is quite busy too. If someone could come along… It would be really nice if someone had the time or the resource to go through and say okay, play actually hits blah, blah, blah because then you can better - we search for it but we don't necessarily have time to make every link. It will be interesting to see over the next few years if it comes back into vogue… But now are we hindered because we've got the curriculum in place being so academic based.*

PT4:   *When we're talking about something as big as play-based, my God, it's a philosophy, it's an approach. It would have to be something that would suggest that it is going to improve student learning outcomes… If next year the evidence shows that play-based learning is going to improve student learning outcomes then play-based learning is what we'll do.*

One educator encapsulated their frustrations with the current education system. For her, teacher beliefs did not figure in the equation as the quest for accountability overshadows any personal conviction in the merits of a play-based approach. She depicted this as follows:

PT4:   *I would also say that it's the way our education system is set up on a whole… it's not about what we believe at the moment, until the system actually changes we're in a system where we want to see improvements and until that actually changes and our whole system is changed we're with the system that we're in now and we need to produce the results that people expect to see.*

Financial barriers in terms of access to resources or school socio-economic demographic characteristics were identified by three of the teachers as affecting whether they believed a play-based approach could exist in their classroom.

PT1:   *So I don't know what resources are out there, and I don't think there are enough resources out there to engage all the children at once. To actually set that up in a classroom you would have to - I can't imagine the expense of it, to actually do that and to have enough resources to keep the children engaged.*

PT2:   *I guess space and resources… I need resources and that takes money. I guess a good thing now is that we are resourced to do that. So within the school environment we've got that.*

PT4:   *We have to work differently than other schools. We don't have the, we have to do things differently in our school because of our demographics. That's the reason why we do the things that we do. We are serving a certain demographic and the way I teach at here I probably wouldn't teach at another school that's in a different demographic… It's not that teachers don't believe in that, we've got a whole lot of teachers that believe in play-based approach but we need to do things differently to boost literacy and numeracy skills.*

When these Kindergarten teachers were asked to consider any other obstacles, like their prior-to-school counterparts they all specified attitudinal factors such as parental expectations or misconceptions as significant. There was general consensus that parents did not value play as an avenue for learning. The participants believed that parents who value measurable and visible academic skills place pressure on teachers to ensure that children's learning results in tangible evidence. Their stated responses embraced the view that as teachers they have difficulty substantiating the value of play in a school curriculum.

PT1:   *…the expectations of the parents of this school are that they come to school and that they learn and that they do really well.*

PT2:   *Parents as well sort of perceive play as not educational enough, why do you do it? The amount of parents that then - even what they do with their kids at home, they get affronted when I say to them put the computer away, don't stress about writing. They come to me and they're asking for extra homework for Kindy kids… So it really is almost educating parents.*

PT3:   *The parents I think are putting a lot more pressure on the children to be learning at a higher level than is expected of them. Then obviously the*

> *pressure comes onto the teachers and I just feel there needs to be more opportunity for them to play.*

PT4: *I also think parent understanding. I would say that if we developed a play-based approach I don't think that parents would actually understand that. I think and I know that there would be benefits and if we could show them benefits but parents want to see results. I think that would be an obstacle. If we had that I don't know that parents would see much value in that.*

Two teachers also identified the belief systems of others as another barrier. Their explanations targeted misconceptions of play and the lack of understanding about the value of play on children's learning.

PT3: *People don't value play enough I think. They don't really see the value it has on their learning… I've always heard people say, oh you shouldn't just let them play, there shouldn't be a time when they're just playing, but people don't actually understand what they're learning through the play.*

PT2: *A lot of people still look at it and say well, that's just you sitting down doing nothing as a teacher isn't it, that's a cop out… If you haven't created a culture where play is valued and explicitly to your adults explained why it's valuable it does become that cop out time. It doesn't necessarily hold the same importance or aiming for the same outcomes.*

5.3   Summary

In review, the previous two chapters provided the findings that elucidated the qualitative data analysis for each case related to participant interviews and document-based sources which unfolded the identified categories and related themes in the findings for the current study. Extracts from interviews with the teacher participants were used to support, clarify and provide depth to the resultant interpretation. Grounded in the data, the findings and case reports offer an insight into teachers' beliefs about play-based pedagogy, pedagogic continuity and influencing factors in their decision-making to use play-based pedagogy in the transition process.

The next chapter presents a cross-case comparison discussion in relation to the three research questions, woven together with the literature review and the theoretical framework as presented in chapters one and two. Drawing the identified

concepts together for all of the three research questions, Figure 5.1 below represents an overview of the related identified categories and themes as a thematic map to assist in guiding the reader throughout the following discussion chapter.
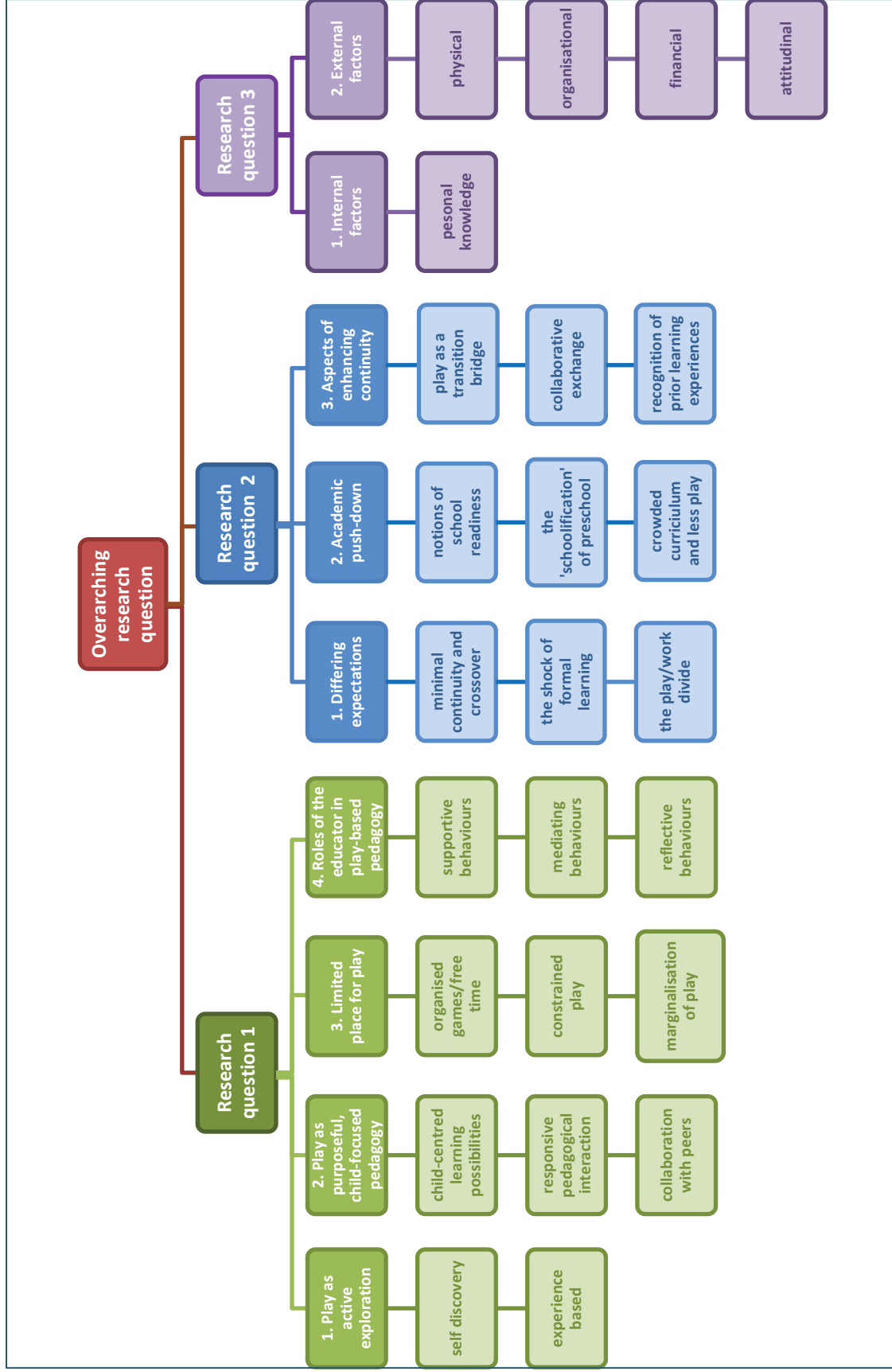
Figure 5.1   Thematic map overview of categories and themes for the current study

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

"When a seedling is transplanted from one place to another, the transplantation may be a stimulus or a shock. The careful gardener seeks to minimise shock so that the plant is re-established as easily as possible"

(Cleave, Jowett, & Bate, 1982, p. 19)

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore whether play-based pedagogy was an important aspect for prior-to-school educators and Kindergarten teachers in supporting pedagogical continuity across the transition to formal schooling. In Chapters Four and Five, the findings of this research project were presented and brought to light the similar and contrasting beliefs of the eight participants. The data provide important insights concerning the use of play-based pedagogy to promote pedagogic continuity and the various ways educators enact its use across the transition to school. This chapter will address and discuss the convergence and divergence in perspectives within the two case studies in relation to the three research questions when compared to and linked with the theoretical framework in Chapter One and literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The discussion will be presented sequentially in line with the research question categories to maintain readability and simplicity including explanations of the findings of this study. It is important to remember that educators do not function in a microcosm that only encompasses themselves; instead they operate within a wider system that incorporates directors and principals, local councils, policy makers and politicians. These external sectors have the potential to influence teacher beliefs in a number of ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

6.1 Discussions of findings for Research Question One: How do prior-to-school educators and Kindergarten teachers view play-based pedagogy?

Participant perspectives about the notion of play as a context for learning and teaching, together with their views of the function and relevance of play-based pedagogy, were explored. Investigation into play-based pedagogy uncovered a multifaceted collection of understandings among both sets of participants. The differing views offered by the participants were informed by their diverse understandings of the purpose of play in young children's learning. It became apparent that they had assorted positions that revealed various personal interpretations and definitions informed by their individual beliefs, knowledge and personal experiences. Explanations were wide-ranging, contingent on what they believed and understood about this construct, which was in turn shaped by the educational purpose of their setting. Whilst educators in both settings championed the importance of play, their beliefs of its value as a 'pedagogical priority' (Bennett et al., 1997) were more evident among the prior-to-school participants. There was congruence between the prior-to-school educators on the one hand and between the Kindergarten teachers on the other, but there was limited congruence between the two groups. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that the belief systems of significant others, such as teachers, within the child's immediate environment are particularly critical because they function as initiators and sustainers of the ongoing reciprocal interpersonal interactions. Thus, in light of this model, the type of teaching and learning processes that occur in the child's microsystem, particularly the style of teacher-child communication and interaction within those processes, affect each child's transition.

6.1.1   Category One – Play as active exploration

An intersecting position for both groups of participants was noted in their descriptions of the nature of play as an exploratory activity for children that included elements such as "play and a self-discovery" (PT1) and experiential learning – "it's really about doing" (EC4). This was particularly evident among explanations from the Kindergarten teachers. Their most cited reason for including play in the school classroom was that children "need to touch things…they need to be able to move" (PT2). This active learning perspective reflected their perception

that the true value of play is inherent in the activities rather than in adult-child interaction. Such a view reveals an underlying philosophy that deems adult contribution in play as more intrusive than informing for the child. Thus, participant beliefs about play as active exploration revealed a predominantly Piagetian constructivist viewpoint, with an emphasis on self-discovery, first-hand experiences and experiential learning (Piaget, 1962) or the 'watch and wait' approach. This finding is consistent with the literature that suggests an adherence to a Piagetian perspective is understandable as his theories have strongly influenced pedagogy (Edwards, 2007; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Wood, 1997). What it also implies is that teachers merely set the stage for play by providing an inviting environment but then step back and do not directly intervene. Moreover, such a view may also contribute to: perceptions held by some educators' that play is frivolous; a general mistrust of play in school contexts and; perpetuating the dichotomy of didactic instruction and the discovery approach. This adds to its minimal presence as a curriculum priority and to the lack of planning for play-based pedagogy beyond prior-to school settings. Teachers in the school sector then question its educational value amidst the struggle and demands for accelerated learning, accountability and reaching achievement targets.

6.1.2   *Category Two – Play as purposeful, child-focused pedagogy*

Overall, participant responses indicated that there was limited congruence in beliefs and practices between the two sets of teachers. Participant groups varied in their beliefs about how they valued play-based pedagogy and therefore this significantly impacted on how it was implemented in their settings. Play-based pedagogy was perceived differently in the contexts of prior-to-school environments and the school classroom. Thus, the microsystem of the classroom or learning environment influences the type of learning and teaching that children experience (Bronfenbrenner, 2001) such that it is either intended as a play space or an academic classroom.

The only point of convergence between the two groups within this category was in the theme of collaboration with peers. Here participants aligned in their

interpretations that play-based pedagogy was purposeful and child-focused when children interacted, supported and scaffolded one another so that "peers contribute ideas to their learning" (EC4) and "peer reinforcement of different things" (PT3). Such a view offers a more social-constructivist orientation, in line with Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1996) who emphasised the role of peers in supporting and scaffolding children's learning.

The variances in pedagogical foundations between the two groups became more evident as they discussed and expanded on their views of play-based pedagogy. Yet, both groups struggled to clearly articulate their understandings of play as a medium for learning and teaching. It proved somewhat difficult to probe participants' thinking beyond the nature and characteristics of play, to analysing play as a construct for learning and particularly, teaching. What the Kindergarten participants tended to define or label as play-based learning did not in fact provide children with opportunities to make true choices or direct their own learning, nor were these experiences derived from a child-centred perspective. Instead, what featured was the predominance of required teacher-directed structure: teacher-chosen activities so that "we set the activities out" (PT2) with a prevalence of teacher-oriented learning. This parallels the findings of Ranz-Smith (2007), whose research conveyed that school children were required to conform to the narrow limits of the classroom teacher who primarily imposed learning experiences.

Additionally, most of the Kindergarten teachers referred to the benefits or the affective quality of play – "there was just so much enjoyment" (PT4), or its favourable role in children's development, not learning. Furthermore, extending on Hyvonen's (2011) research, the school teachers valued play for having social relevance, as a socialisation activity where children were seen as practising friendships. Also, informal play experiences were provided because "kids at this age don't have fine motor or gross motor skills that they would have had when I first started teaching" (PT2). In line with research by Dockett (2011), few were able to articulate or convey their understanding about the impact of play on children's

learning beyond references to developmental domains such as "social and emotional and fine motor and all that sort of stuff" (PT3).

The early childhood educators maintained that play-based pedagogy was foundational to their teaching and explained that play was implemented "absolutely, every day" (EC2), but they also grappled with their interpretations and definitions. Some shared their definitions tentatively – "I've never really thought about that before" (EC2). They did, however, all emphasise that "I know how important play is for children" (EC2) and "I couldn't imagine it any other way" (EC4). Throughout their accounts, these educators repeatedly stressed that "that's the way they [children] learn, is through their play" (EC1) and it was possible to see "what they're learning from it" (EC3).

In their definitions, play and learning were inextricably linked; this parallels research findings that the two are inherently woven together (Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012) and inseparable (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2010). Each one explained that they focused their instructional practice on play-based learning. They specified that play-based pedagogy was child-centred and that they purposefully planned for it from children's interests through "planning and learning from what you've observed" (EC1). Additionally, they stated that the provision of a play-based approach was what made learning meaningful to children within authentic contexts. Understandably, prior-to-school educators have much of their educational training and experiences based on this approach, and so recognise the importance of play. Additionally, in Australia, play-based learning is mandated and validated in the national early childhood framework – the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009). While all the prior-to-school educators considered play-based pedagogy as purposeful, as underpinning children's learning and foundational to their own practice, their explanations did not include all those aspects described in the literature or in definitions in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009). What was missing was the acknowledgement of the importance of sustained-shared thinking or co-construction of knowledge (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Extending on the work of researchers such as Rogers (2011) and Wood (2010a), the

current study found that the ability to describe good quality play in practice persists as an on-going challenge for early years educators that further extend the tensions between the rhetoric and reality of play for learning.

Hence, the diverse perspectives offered by the participants support assertions among the play literature of the many meanings attributed to the word 'play' (Fleer, 2009; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Reflecting the findings of play researchers (Dockett & Fleer, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Moyles, 2015; Wood, 2009), play-based pedagogy in the current study was difficult to define as it was context dependent (Wood & Attfield, 2005; Wood, 2013) and contexts were wide-ranging. I therefore argue that the term 'play' has come to mean everything and nothing, weakened in its significance and trivialised, due to over-definition and over-use. Vagueness around a clear, operational definition of play-based pedagogy does little to confirm and support the claim that children learn through play, particularly for teachers in schools faced with pressures of administrative directives and accountability. Furthermore, within the field of education, and more broadly within society, there exists competing discourses around the notion of play which challenge its idealised status (Wood, 2013). Tensions surrounding the ideological forms of free, discovery play and the educational versions of 'purposeful' play create philosophical struggles for teachers who develop ambiguous or hazy conceptualisations. Lack of theoretical clarity presents a primary challenge to constructs of play-based pedagogy (Howard & McInnes, 2010). Definitions should take into account these different contexts as play carries different meanings and connotations depending on the experiences educators have had with it.

The findings also illuminate the complexity for educators in articulating the practice of play-based pedagogy and explaining how they facilitate learning and teaching through play. In the current study, this may be more expected for the Kindergarten teachers, whose tertiary qualifications may have had a limited play-based component, but was particularly evident among the prior-to-school educators. This also brings to light the enduring debate about the relationship between playing, learning and teaching (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Conceptualising

play-based pedagogy posed a challenge for all the participants in the current study (Wood, 2009; Wood, 2010a). The fact that the participants with specific early childhood qualifications were more confident in explaining conditions for learning rather than conditions for teaching warrants more attention. An explanation for this could be the dominance of a long-standing child development perspective, derived from developmental psychology that propels early childhood pedagogical and curriculum decision making (Grieshaber, 2008; McArdle & McWilliam, 2005; Ryan & Goffin, 2008). Consequently, 'teaching' has not been foregrounded in ECEC research and whilst mentioned in the *EYLF*, the use of the term is minimal.

In their explanations, the early childhood participants were the only group to all specify that play-based pedagogy required the responsive engagement of educators "to make learning happen" (EC1) and "promote the learning a little bit more" (EC4). There was a strong belief that the active presence of adults was essential which "helps them [children] to develop and learn" (EC4). Their stated beliefs underscore the literature about the importance of the role of the adult in play-based pedagogy (Martlew, Stephen, & Ellis 2011; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004; Wood, 2013; Wood & Attfield, 2005) and the important role of interactions to facilitate the 'meaning-making' process. Hence, this perspective indicates that these prior-to-school educators have embraced aspects of social-cultural theories locating play within Vygotsky's and Bruner's models of adult-guided scaffolding. What was noticeably absent from their descriptions was reference to intentional teaching (DEEWR, 2009; Epstein, 2014) and how responsive adults promote and engage in sustained shared thinking, problem-solving and co-construction of knowledge (DEEWR, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). So, in light of Bronfenbrenner's framework, it is the role of the responsive teacher to ensure that the proximal processes in the child's microsystem are valuable and challenging. Proximal processes that only involve infrequent episodes of prolonged, interactional activity or those performed over short periods of time will have limited influence on children's learning and development.

6.1.3   Category Three – Limited place for play

This category, unique to the case of the Kindergarten teachers, became evident in the findings as they expounded their theories of play. Play as the predominant pedagogy was absent either because of misconceptions of play-based pedagogy and the value of a play-based curriculum in a school context, or was minimal as a result of constraining influences. Here, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) exosystem and macrosystem influences on teachers' beliefs and theories of play became evident. He pointed out that children's early experiences, such as school transitions, are not only shaped by their surrounding microsystems and mesosystems but also by more distal contexts such as local exosystem decision-making and policy initiatives, and societal macrosystem influences.

Even though each teacher, in her own way, expressed value to be found in play, and professed the importance of play in young children's lives, in line with Hyvonen's (2011) and Lynch's (2015) research findings, it was relegated to limited episodes. This is also in agreement with research conducted by Moyles (2010b), in which although teachers expressed they valued play, it was secondary to adult-led or designed activities. Hence, participant definitions and interpretations included teacher-directed activities that solely incorporated playful games or comprised of play as occasional free time. Thus, where play was used it was often as: time for socialising and exploration of manipulatives; relief from didactic instruction when children were tired; or it encompassed a reward for work completed. Play was also limited to brief transitional phases at the beginning of the school year as "that's a real focus in those first few weeks" (PT2), but as time progressed this teacher lamented that it was decreased to "about an hour and 20 a week" (PT2). The use of organised games was a means of supplementing components of more formal education in a fun and interesting way as it "enhanced the learning experience" (PT4). This infused teacher-initiated play provided moments in the day where, as an instructional strategy, it proposed to keep children focussed and engaged because "I need to use what connects them and gets them into the work" (PT2). Though, one teacher added "so that's what I would call play, in a very general term" (PT1). The

use of games as play in these Kindergarten classes supports teachers'
understandings of the Piagetian perspective and the increase in games with rules in
the school years. However, what such limited perspectives and occurrences ignore
is a major feature of play as existing on a continuum and so the educational
potential of play in these classrooms was not fully realised. It is important that
teachers develop an understanding of the development and progression of play in
both complexity and challenge as children progress through the school years, rather
than simply using play for its ability to make learning fun for children or solely to
develop social skills.

Constrained play was another feature of this category. Of the four
Kindergarten participants, the early childhood trained Kindergarten teacher held
play in the highest regard and expressed her deep belief in the value of play. She
explained her attempts to translate her training into practice and expressed her
strong desire for its inclusion into her classroom as she envisioned it, but regularly
reiterated that at school "we have to do the structured stuff" (PT3). Others revealed
less trust in play – "when I say play-based I'm thinking a structured learning
experience incorporating play" (PT4), or "to meet the outcomes of the syllabus and
what our unit of work wants it is quite structured" (PT3). In this instance, play was
constrained by the beliefs that play requires high levels of teacher structure for it to
be valuable in children's learning, or that it was constrained by curricular
expectations.

The final theme identified within this category was the marginalisation of
play. Two Kindergarten teachers specifically stated that play-based pedagogy was
neither a beneficial nor relevant medium for learning in the school environment,
though they valued more romantic or idealised notions of free play. One teacher
explained that "if I do do it, it's number one to transition children from pre-school
into school" (PT4) but this was only "for the first three weeks of school" (PT4) when
formal programs were collapsed. The other teacher reasoned that she did not think
that the "idea of just play and go away and discover it by yourself is really going to
teach them anything" (PT1). Thus, this study contributes to the research base that

how teachers view play is based on their pedagogical orientations and this reflects the position that play is assigned in the learning environment and similarly in the transition process. The current study has identified that encouraging teachers to question how their values, beliefs and theories of play influence their practice is important. When considering the status of play, this can be viewed in relation to the status accorded to children. Data from the current study strongly indicates that teachers in schools may find the idea of giving children choice and allowing them to make or share in curricular decisions as threatening adult authority, or it may not sit well with their own values. Also, limited educational training or professional development opportunities around play-based approaches narrow teachers' understandings of the function that play has in children's learning and of the significance of the proactive guiding role of the adult that is required to facilitate this learning.

These findings highlight a dilemma - that locating a place for play within the learning environment is problematic beyond prior-to-school settings. A key finding from the current study is that while there is increasing evidence in research and the literature that play as a vehicle for learning should be the preferred pedagogy in the early years of schooling (Briggs & Hansen, 2012; Devlin, 2012; Harrison, 2015; Hunkin, 2014; Sandberg & Heden, 2011; Smith, 2015), nevertheless it is not being utilised in the Kindergarten year for a number of reasons. In the first year of school, where educators are grappling with the 'crowded curriculum' and the pressures of meeting outcomes, play is becoming lost in transition and squeezed out of classroom life. Furthermore, there is limited research about play beyond the early childhood period to enlighten educators about how children's play advances as they mature and how the school curriculum can scaffold the advancement of children's learning through play (Briggs & Hansen, 2012; Smith, 2015; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Added to this, there is conjecture around the idea that much beyond age five, play for children becomes less relevant (Wood & Attfield, 2005). As children move through the early years of formal schooling, play becomes a distant memory.

6.1.4   Category Four – Roles of the educator in play-based pedagogy

There was congruence between the two groups in their descriptions of their roles. Generally explanations of their perceived roles in play-based pedagogy revealed that these were multi-layered and contained various degrees of involvement from supportive to mediating behaviours. The *EYLF* mandates reflective practice on the part of early childhood educators, however in the current study there was a noticeable absence of descriptions of reflective behaviours particularly within the prior-to-school group. Participant views of their roles can be considered in the light of Bronfenbrenner's (2001) bio-ecological model which notes the significance of reciprocal interpersonal relationships, or proximal processes, between the individual (child) and his or her ecology (in this case the microsystems of preschools and schools) as being key to children's development and learning. Bronfenbrenner (2001) contended that 'proximal processes' are effective when they occur continually and regularly over time, thus strengthening human relationships within supportive environments and so can increase the scope of development, and therefore, learning.

Prior-to-school educators demonstrated a stronger understanding of explaining supportive behaviours in their role as compared to mediating behaviours. A thorough search through the their data set found minimal uses of the word 'teach' or 'teaching', and instead they used alternate terms to describe their pedagogical work. Overall, the prior-to-school educators in this study most often mentioned supportive behaviours and frequently referred to themselves as "facilitators", "instigators" or "observers" rather than as teachers during play-based learning. Additionally, they also cited their role as that of a "guide", "documenter" and "planner". When participants referred to teaching it was usually in the context of discussions about schools. Mediating behaviours such as demonstrating, questioning and scaffolding featured much less in their descriptions. An explanation for this outlook could be the long-held dominance of the Developmentally Appropriate Practice discourse and developmental perspectives within ECEC as these have narrowed additional avenues of thinking and practices

of teaching and learning (Grieshaber, 2008; Kilderry, 2015). These child-centred, discovery learning approaches have contributed to educators in the current study feeling unwilling and hesitant to employ instructive practices together with a fear of inappropriate intervention. Such views in the current study echo and extend on findings by Kilderry (2012), Leggett and Ford (2013) and McArdle and McWilliam (2005), and highlight that even seven years after the introduction of the *EYLF*, a document which draws strongly on socio-cultural theories, educators are still wrestling with their professional identities as teachers and their accompanying pedagogical interactions. Furthermore, such theoretical strongholds narrow the range of teaching strategies that educators draw upon.

The inclusion of the term scaffolding by some of the prior-to-school participants in their descriptions signified more of a social-cultural view of the participatory role of the adult in play-based learning and is also a reference to the bi-directional, reciprocal proximal processes that influence the type of interactions with the adults in children's environments (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Thus, the style of teaching and strategies used by a teacher in the child's educational microsystem influences that child's learning and development. Stronger and more connected, sustained educational relationships result in more positive developmental and learning outcomes. This is important given that research evidence maintains that the higher the quality of the ECEC experience, the better children do upon entry to school (OECD, 2006, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). However, the participants did not elaborate on the nature of the type of support and guidance within scaffolded episodes and so perhaps being a "scaffolder" was used to mean any type of teacher support, thus undermining the Vygotskian notion of co-construction of knowledge. The educators in the current study held a limited understanding of this term; a clearer explanation of how educators function in children's Zones of Proximal Development would highlight a deeper understanding of the collaborative and negotiated adult-learner relationship.

Whilst there was a noticeable absence of specific references to intentional teaching, one of the eight practices described in the *EYLF*, it is interesting to note

that in the accounts of the various roles of the prior-to-school participants, they actually described several strategies characteristic of intentional teaching without explicitly naming or referring to this term. As described in the *EYLF*, it was clear that they moved in and out of these roles and depending on the contexts, drew upon a range of these strategies. Some of these included modelling, demonstrating, questioning (sometimes specifically identified as open-ended questioning), and documenting children's learning. When references were made to extending children's learning, this was usually in the form of providing additional resources; however no descriptions of extending included the engagement in shared thinking or problem-solving to foster higher level thinking skills (DEEWR, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). Thus, the findings in the current study extend on Australian research carried out by Kilderry (2012) and Leggett and Ford (2013) which highlighted the challenges that educators experience in articulating intentional pedagogies and signals the need for deeper understandings and wider definitions for specifically referring to intentionality. Furthermore, whilst the prior-to-school educators explained the importance of being involved in children's play, they did not refer to themselves as co-players, nor did they explain this involvement as the co-construction of knowledge or joint attention (Bruner, 1996) with children. It is only through the proximal processes of close, sustained involvement and interaction between adults and children that recognition of intentional teaching can be identified. Together with the exclusion of references to their role as reflective practioners, they highlighted that other curriculum priorities such as preparing, organising and resourcing the environment and routines within it; supervisory obligations; and observing, recording and documenting children's learning leaving little time to engage in co-playing and co-learning with the children for extended periods and also time to critically reflect on practice.

Likewise, many of the school participants also depicted similar portrayals within the supportive behaviour category. Given that many of the school teacher accounts of using play-based pedagogy were actually opportunities for free time or organised games, their descriptions of their roles during such periods were also related to supervisory duties. Minimal mention of co-playing with the children,

together with the absence of references to reflective practice within the school teachers' accounts, denotes limited attention to observing, discussing and reflecting on children's meaning and intentions in their play episodes. Coupled with the weight of formal learning, curricular expectations and increased demands of assessment and accountability, this would result in less time spent considering their understanding of what children learn though play – hence play fails to deliver evidence of progress and achievement in children's learning.

Mediating behaviours, including instructing, directing and explaining, featured more strongly in their responses. This is understandable given that teachers in schools tend to employ more didactic and instructional pedagogies, and so these may be transferred to classroom play periods. Only the early childhood trained teacher referred to herself as being a "scaffolder" however she did not provide any clarification as to what this entailed in relation to her role in children's play.

6.2   Discussions on findings for Research Question Two: What do prior-to-school educators and Kindergarten teachers believe about pedagogic continuity in the transition process?

In this section, participant beliefs regarding the concept of pedagogic continuity in the transition process were investigated. Kindergarten teacher and early childhood educator understandings about the term pedagogic continuity revealed that this term is unclear and proved difficult for them to define and explain. A closer examination of their deliberations illustrated their views of the relationship between early childhood education and formal schooling, or as Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the interaction between the microsystems – which he terms the mesosystem. All participants emphasised that the differences between preschool and school, a change of microsystems, are too extreme, replicating findings in transition to school literature. In this study, participants called for stronger communication channels between the two settings. Moreover, participants

noted that the pressure from 'top-down' pedagogy feeds a focus on child readiness concepts and the play/work divide, pushing play to the sidelines. Overall, there was congruence among and within both case studies across the three categories for this research question except for two themes that surfaced from responses by the school participants i.e.

- The play/work divide and
- Crowded curriculum and less play.

In general, beliefs about pedagogic continuity centred on school readiness concepts, disparities between the two educational environments and suggestions for improving continuity. These suggestions seldom referred to a pedagogical orientation, but featured explanations of short orientation programs or transitional activities. Not only did they not provide examples of pedagogic continuity, they questioned the quality of continuity experienced by the children in their care.

6.2.1   *Category One – Differing expectations*

The two participant groups were in agreement about the lack of crossover or continuity in the transition process. They expressed a desire for wanting "more of a smoother transition going in from early childhood into your kindergarten or your regular school setting" (PT4). In line with the transition research (Johannson, 2007; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Petriwskyj, 2010), they believed that the period for adjustment should be about slowly easing children into the school environment, although in practice what they described were usually brief phases – not an ongoing process. Contrary to the literature (DEECD, 2009; Dockett & Perry, 2008, 2014; ETC Research Group, 2011; Fabian, 2012, 2013) that suggests there are increasingly successful transition mechanisms, both sets of participants maintained that the move to the Kindergarten year was characterised by an abrupt and distinct change and they felt that this juncture did not facilitate a smooth transition – "it's such two different concepts and two different settings" (PT3).

Both groups illuminated the sharp difference in expectations that exist between the different sectors of education and noted that "our expectations are so

far apart for the children" (PT1) and "they need that continuity, something familiar or something they feel comfortable with or they know the expectations" (EC3). Given that the two cases were diverse groups of teachers in different educational settings, it is not surprising that such diversity is reflected in their expectations. However, they considered that the dissimilarities were too extreme or disparate when children first commence formal schooling and "not to expect them to come from a learning environment like this, and move straight into sitting at a desk, having the blackboard and stuff" (EC1). Continuity between the prior-to school and school settings is important to consider in the transition process (Ackesjö, 2013b; CCCH, 2008; Connor, 2011; Noel, 2011) and it is now well recognised that placing more emphasis on the continuity of learning is an essential feature of promoting positive and effective transitions (DEECD, 2009; Dockett & Perry, 2014; Harrison, 2015; Smith, 2015; Smith & Maher, 2016 in press). Similarly, participants in this study remarked that there should be such continuity between the environments "at least for a while until they ease in" (EC1) and perceived that "it could be quite a smoother transition I think, but it's not" (PT3) which led them to the conclusion: "I don't think there is a continuity" (PT4).

A consistent theme in participants' descriptions was discontinuity. Both groups emphasised the abrupt change in pedagogical approaches and the shift to more formal academic demands between prior-to-school education and formal schooling – "it's unfortunate in a Kindy atmosphere, it's a very different type of teaching for the children" (EC2). Furthermore, they explained that as children move across the educational border, the change in learning environments from an active to a more formal, sedentary setting was considered to be a major source of transition challenge for children because "it is formal learning, it is formal instruction" (PT1). There was agreement that the 'sit still and listen' expectation characteristic of a Kindergarten class was unrealistic and this was particularly noted by the prior-to-school participants. For them, it is this variance, or discontinuity, that can be considered as contributing to some of the tension that exists between the two - "but we're here saying no. It's really hard for them to do at such a young age" (EC2). This echoes previous research results that bring to light the dominance of

disparities between the two sectors (Henderson, 2012; Margetts, 2002; Skouteris et al., 2012; Timperley et al., 2003). This study extends these findings to clearly articulate the immediate necessity to create a balance or complementarity between these environments.

This emphasis on the 'sit still and listen' expectation in schools raises the question of whether Kindergarten classrooms are indeed ready to welcome and accommodate a range of children with varying needs and provide more active rather than passive learning environments. I question whether such pedagogical approaches used in the first year of school are the most effective for maximising children's learning opportunities at this level. Moreover, children who have crossed over from prior-to-school settings do not suddenly become changed learners in short transition phases. However, in view of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory, the source of these discontinuities does not always sit within the microsystem where individual teachers operate (Petriwskyj, 2005) but lies in the exosystem in which the fundamental differences of policies and frameworks that guide the two sectors exist. In line with Broström's (2013) findings, this current study also established that though there is a notion of continuity that is espoused, albeit at a rhetorical level, within policy frameworks (DEEWR, 2009; ACARA, 2012) that exist in the exosystem layer (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), this is frequently not experienced within the reality of daily life in the microsystems of the two educational settings. Pursuing the coherence and connectedness that Bredekamp (2010) recommends can prove difficult where there is diversity in how teachers think about curricula and their pedagogical work in either the prior-to-school or school setting. It can further create a fundamental barrier to overcoming this challenge. Therefore, what teachers do in transition process within these two contexts has significant potential to ensure pedagogical continuity. Given that transition process necessitates meeting the demands of these two microsystem environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), if strong mesosystem links do not exist and the child's microsystems advocate opposing values and philosophies, then inevitably tensions can surface and the child may experience the burden of this stress as a result of trying to cope with these differing expectations.

The polarity between play and work surfaced when the Kindergarten teachers expressed their doubts about using a play-based approach in the first year of school to support pedagogic continuity, particularly in relation to its function in meeting rigorous academic measures. In descriptions of their teaching practices, these teachers did not conceptualise a play and work continuum but instead viewed them as a distinct dichotomy. Such results extend the research literature in which play is viewed by practitioners in opposition to work or learning (Fung & Cheng, 2012; Hyvonen, 2011; McInnes et al., 2011; Walsh et al., 2008; Yelland, 2011). Expectations of teachers in this study were that children need to understand "Kindergarten… this is the time to sit and do work" (PT1). Whilst they had earlier professed their beliefs in the significance of play, these perceptions were at a superficial level in terms of children's activities (self-discovery and active exploration) and that of children's psychological states (fun, naturalness), or in serving largely social functions. In other words, they regarded play as either an adjunct activity - a work before play emphasis, or as merely free time to "just free play" (PT4) and not as a serious endeavour or pedagogical construct because "it's not play to learn" (PT1). Play was framed as beneficial only in the context as a transitional settling-in phase before 'real' work began, used for relaxing, recreational pursuits "as a tool for when they finish their work" (PT3), or as a reward - "you did your reading and writing, you get to choose whatever activity you want" (PT4). As such, these school participants did not believe that learning outcomes could be attained through play, particularly in terms of achieving curricular academic targets. To them, play was separate from learning. In their descriptions of classroom practice they noted that school was a place for learning, not playing and that "there are expectations for children that they play in the playground but in the classroom it's a learning time" (PT4). Particularly, teachers believed that it would be difficult to achieve effective learning of literacy and numeracy skills through a play-based approach without the use of explicit instruction. Findings from the current study point towards the need for more clarification about what play as pedagogy means in the early years of school.

The lack of a precise operational definition of play-based pedagogy, and limited research that explains and validates how the school curriculum can support play progression and children's learning through play, contributes to such beliefs held by school teachers. Alternatively, such opinions have developed because of diverging perspectives within play research about the relationship between playing and learning (Wood & Attfield, 2005) and so play is viewed as less relevant in schools and relegated to a frivolous activity or a short-lived transitional period. Moreover, this is not surprising considering the differences in training, there is no reason to believe that the both groups of teachers would hold similar beliefs. All but one of these Kindergarten teachers held primary school teaching qualifications which do not essentially provide a focus on a child-centred, play-based approach but instead direct teachers to target syllabus content knowledge and use more didactic, explicit instruction. Thus, teachers' theories about play and work or learning impact on their practice and influence how they implement the curriculum. Furthermore, the abrupt change in curriculum documents between the two settings impact on teaching and learning approaches where there is a distinct move from a process-oriented to an outcome-geared context. At the exosystem level, the systemic requirements of schools within which teachers work, and the accompanying achievement standards and accountability pressures, compel teachers in the current study to direct their teaching energies and strategies to meeting targets rather than meeting children's needs. In view of the Kindergarten teachers, learning then requires explicit teaching and the 'learning through play' mantra has minimal value in terms of achieving the 'work' content that is required.

6.2.2   Category Two – Academic push-down

Notions of school readiness was the one theme in common between the two case studies within this category. Whilst the participants were conscious of the need for continuity, their discussions about transition practices used were framed by readiness constructs - "making sure that they're prepared with all the basic skills that they'll need for school" (EC1).   Prior-to-school educator comments oriented towards an awareness of children's individual preparedness and that "getting the

children prepared for school in a preschool is the most important thing" (EC2). These findings are in line with the transition literature that maintains continuity as a concept is closely bound with the idea of children's 'readiness' to commence school with its mainly didactic pedagogy (Arnold et al., 2006; Broström, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2013; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Griebel & Niesel, 2002; Johansson, 2007; Peters, 2010). A central premise within this research is the significance of ensuring continuity of experience for all children as they transition to school. While this remains a problematic concept it does have the effect of challenging teachers to understand what this means.

Participants in both sectors revealed a strong focus on a hierarchical relationship between the early childhood sector and formal schooling – one that maintains and emphasises an hierarchical idea of readiness, with attention to the 'readiness to learn' or 'school readiness' discourse (Moss, 2013). The preschool educators in the current study reasoned that an unequal association results where formal schooling dominates the relationship and considered that "we're kind of at the whim of what's the school structure" (EC3). Readiness constructs were particularly evident in the references made by each of the Kindergarten participants to the Best Start assessment which centres on individual skills of entrant children. These school teachers believed "that's again where the Best Start I think comes into place" (PT3) because it "sets us up to what children know when they come to school" (PT1). This finding reaffirms previous results that have noted a prevailing spotlight on such notions of readiness within Australian transition research that focuses on individual children's abilities (Dockett & Perry, 2013; Petriwskyj, 2010). A focal point on readiness concepts was associated with deeply held personal beliefs of social maturation or the focus on readiness of academic content knowledge (Petriwskyj, 2005, 2010, 2013). A further explanation provided by the participants was that Kindergarten has changed and taken on a more academic role with a greater focus on literacy and numeracy targets – "I think that's the big thing for today's kindergarten is, it is such an intense program. It is intense, I know it's intense" (PT1). This was particularly noted by the Kindergarten teacher from the low-socioeconomic/high EAL school - "all I know is that when they come in we

have clear targets and clear expectations of where we're wanting to go and that's all I'm focused on" (PT4). At a macrosystem level, testable 'school readiness skills', especially in relation to literacy and numeracy, have become an increased focus for policy makers both internationally and in Australia who are anxious to raise standards (Early et al., 2010; Whitebread & Bingham, 2011). Such intervention increasingly places pressure on prior-to-school educators to make children 'ready for school'. Also, teachers in schools are being challenged then, to reconceptualise the school's role in assisting children to continue to learn in a school context. What is further needed is to encourage more disconnection of the readiness notion from the transition period, placing a stronger spotlight on the readiness of schools to receive children and to support their continued learning.

In line with what Moss (2013) proposes in terms of the indisputable relationship between ECEC and formal schooling, an explanation for the readiness perspectives of all the prior-to-school participants could be that they are shaped by the structural framework in which preschools reside, particularly in the NSW Australian context. They are part of the system of ECEC which incorporates the 'childcare' sector (those serving children birth to 5 years) and the sector to which they belong – the 'early education' sector (those serving children over 3 years of age). As such, they fall into the 'pre-primary' approach (Moss, 2013) to education and so are liable to be strongly influenced by formal school objectives and methods. As a result, prior-to-school educators feel their role is one of preparing children for school or providing the groundwork for future school performance by duplicating the experiences and expectations of the Kindergarten programme – particularly as children near the transition period. In terms of the hierarchical education ladder, prior-to-school settings sit on the bottom rung. As a result, ECEC services become locked into a system that expects children to achieve school readiness skills – a foundation that readies children for the next stage of education.

Another theme within this category unique only among the prior-to-school participants was that of: the 'schoolification' of preschool. Attention around child-focussed readiness aspects emphasised a more 'schoolified' approach in their

transition practices – one that is seen more from the point of view of formal schooling (Moss, 2008, 2013; OECD, 2006).   Participants suggested that they incorporate "what they learn in Kindergarten, into the centre" (EC2) and resolved "we see at school there are a lot of things they don't have choice in…so our preparation for them is activities like that" (EC3). Whilst they believed it was not about "formally teaching them to read or write" (EC3), elements such as children should "know basic colours, numbers, shape" (EC1) or the preschool's inclusion of "a Jolly Phonics program that we've got in place at the moment" (EC2) characterised the notion of preschools delivering children to school's fixed standards. Such a relationship centres on prior-to-school services being 'future focussed' about preparation for academic success or viewing the child as a future economic resource rather than viewing this period as a time of life. Early childhood education should not be viewed as an acceleration process driven by beliefs that commencing academic learning earlier will advance children in literacy and numeracy, in spite of research that claims the contrary (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011). This unique phase of human development should be valued in the moment. A consideration therefore, could be to not use the word 'preschool' for these early childhood settings.

A point of difference between the two case studies arose in the Kindergarten teachers' accounts as they described exosystem, institutional pressures of an overcrowded curriculum that leaves less time to include play in the school day. This supports and further contributes to the literature base which discusses the current demise of play both in preschool and school settings (Ginsberg, 2007; Graue, 2009; Hirsh-Pasek, et al., 2009; McGregor, 2010; Miller & Almon, 2009; Wohlend & Peppler, 2015). The Kindergarten teachers acknowledged the importance of pedagogic continuity "just to continue the approach of learning that they have in the preschool into the school" (PT3) but lamented on the restrictions imposed upon them by educational expectations in the Kindergarten year. Their comments considered the tensions that exist for teachers between practice and policy and the shift occurring in curricular expectations in this first year of formal schooling "because we've got the curriculum in place being so academic based" (PT2). They

highlighted the pressures that Kindergarten teachers now encounter in their settings in finding a position for play within more formal, academic-based educational contexts – "we do have specific targets and goals that we need to achieve with regards to learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy" (PT4). These teachers revealed they felt overwhelmed "sometimes I just go, oh this is too much… It's push, push, push at them" (PT1) and were resigned to the conformities required in a school environment – "it becomes very much 'so this is what we're doing and this is how we need you to be and this is what you need to do'" (PT4). For them, play exists within short transition-to-school phases, but after children settle into the new school routines "it's not as play-based as it can be" (PT4). Participants explained that at other times play survives on the fringes of the school day "but I also know it gets lost in the business of everything else" (PT2). Play is squeezed to fit somewhere into the busy schedule of academic instruction because "the amount of outcomes… there's so much more these days to how it was before" (PT3). Overall, participants stated there is less time for play in the Kindergarten year because of "such a crammed curriculum" (PT1) and "we've got all these targets which are set for us; all this data" (PT1) or "the shift even of what you're supposed to be achieving in kindergarten" (PT2).

These findings support and extend the Australian literature (Alliance for High Quality Education in the Early Years of Schooling, 2014; Australian Primary Principals Association, 2014; Australian Government Department of Education, 2014) that highlight calls from school teachers about an overcrowded curriculum with an overemphasis on literacy and numeracy development. Furthermore, internationally, there has been a trend to increase young children's cognitive competence. Recent exosystem changes to Australian policy directives that have focussed on the investment in early years education from an economic viewpoint have also brought a sharper focus at the microsystem level of schools to produce stronger cognitive outcomes, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy capabilities. Hence, this accounts for the very limited reference to play in the new Australian Curriculum.

6.2.3   Category Three – Aspects of enhancing continuity

Both groups of participants believed that continuity could be improved across children's transition crossings. However, their discussions around key considerations for this centred not so much at the microsystem level of pedagogical practices within the classroom, but more so within the mesosystem layer of creating stronger communication channels or collaborative partnerships and exchanges between practitioners in both settings. An explanation for this is that the participants consider the pedagogical chasm between the two microsystems just too big to conquer, but that a meeting place in terms of communication was more achievable.

A suggestion offered by both groups, which extends the findings of Broström (2013) and does operate within the mesosystem level, was the use of play as a transition bridge in the Kindergarten setting. The prior-to-school educators voiced their beliefs that continuity or 'flow' should be achieved through a play-based approach "to do it the way we do it, through play… just to have that continuity, at least for a while" (EC1). This they considered would facilitate "a happy medium between the atmospheres of preschool and Kindy" (EC2). The Kindergarten teachers also acknowledged the importance of continuity "just to continue the approach of learning that they have in the preschool into the school" (PT3) so "we are giving them a chance to settle from an environment that they used to be familiar with" (PT4). But in reality, it was mostly free play that featured centre stage within brief transition phases during the early weeks of school, or as free time offered during the afternoon. They explained that "we step back from the academic focus for the first two or three weeks" (PT2) and "it is a transition period where we're not doing anything hard and heavy… and it was play-based" (PT4), but afterwards they "really start the learning in kindergarten" (PT4).

What has to be asked though is whether these fleeting transition play bridges are sufficient to ensure effective transitions for all children, or is it more beneficial to make the crossing of the boundary between free play to play-based pedagogy to safeguard children's trajectories in the Kindergarten year and beyond?

Recent research regarding the benefits of play-based pedagogy in the early years of school (Harrison, 2015; Hunkin, 2014; Smith, 2015) has pointed to significant advantages in minimising discontinuity between the two settings and also improving student learning in the long term. Consequently, what the findings demand then, in relation to Bronfenbrenner's model and consideration of the bi-directional influences within that, is that teachers in both contexts will need to advocate at the exosystem policy level. This will require teachers to appeal to governments to listen to research evidence about the benefits for children's transition process of a more gradual introduction into formal learning and to supplement their practice via the transference of the principles of early learning into the school setting to smooth the transition to school.

Extending on Broström's (2013) categories of educational differences, they each agreed that there was communication discontinuity in the transition process and believed that "I don't think that there is enough conversation between the teachers" (PT1). They deemed there was much room for improvement in this area and expressed that "I guess the odds are improving but it's still not I guess where I feel it should be, that continuity of the information exchange" (EC3). Participants in both case studies emphasised their strong belief in the importance of collaborative exchange or sharing of information to improve continuity. Thus, teachers' pleas for stronger communication channels mirror results in the OECD's report Starting Strong II (OECD, 2006) of a 'strong and equal partnership' between both sectors and also Moss's (2013) idea of creating a 'meeting place'. Drawing on the principles of ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in understanding the transition to school, it is essential to consider the interconnections between the contexts and the people within them, such as teachers in both settings, as these influence how children experience this journey. The extent to which the child experiences the links between the two microsystems empowers his or her transition between these systems to be both positive and successful, as opposed to detrimental and negative. This interrelationship, participants emphasised, was essential which further supports Bronfenbrenner's (1979) assertion that how teachers connect and interact affects the level of continuity experienced by the child. Additionally, this reinforces O'Kane's

(2015) findings that collaborative relationships between teachers in both settings are essential so that the transition to school is a shared responsibility. Some suggestions offered by the participants revolved around short orientation occurrences such as mutual visits or the transference of information. However, it is useful at this point to reflect back on Mayfield's (2003) definition of continuity as being viewed as an ongoing process. Low levels of communication or unidirectional transference of information will not suffice in order to build strong linkages, a shared responsibility, and continuity between the settings.

In addition, extending on the thinking of researchers such as Moss (2013) and Henderson (2014), it is perhaps the very nature of this tension between the early childhood-school relationship that may prove to be a potential site for a new way of relating and co-existing, together with the creation of a "shared borderland" (Britt & Sumsion, 2003, p.134). A joint focus at the mesosystem level between the two educational settings would provide greater alignment in teaching practices within the microsystems. At an exosystem level, policy planners need to adopt the vision of a shared co-construction of transition between the two sectors. In order to develop enhanced continuity in the transition process, a stronger understanding of the relationships between, and divergences of viewpoints, in the two settings is required. The current study has contributed to the research base in this area.

However, in agreement with Timperley et al. (2003) and Ackesjö (2013b) the critical dimensions of continuity and similarity in the current study have not been identified clearly. Whilst teachers advocate for collaborative exchange, work needs to be done on developing an effective process for sharing the responsibility. There seems to be little understanding of the processes required to do this and participants noted "there's no avenue for me to kind of contact someone and pass on this information which I think often is a shame" (EC3). Such a relationship needs to focus on how to create a course for continuity across the transition. If the shared goal between teachers in both sectors is to improve the transition process so that it is smoother and more effective, then understandings about collaborative efforts need to move beyond frequency or avenues of contact. Changes need to be made at

the policy level in the form of a long-term policy strategy, so that these fragmented and uncoordinated local level exchanges make way for a more cohesive national approach which focuses on continuity in children's education, and builds on the knowledge, experience and skills of children. This extends the findings of international researchers such as Dunlop (2013), Einarsdottir (2013), and Fabian (2013) whose focus has been on the construction of relationships between the two settings and have called for the development of formal policies that endorse stronger linkages and continuity of learning between early childhood and school settings that acknowledge and build on children's prior learning.

The recognition of children's funds of knowledge or prior learning experiences was a position of agreement among both sets of participants. This was considered a key aspect in building continuity of learning for children "so that when they do start school, the teachers know where they're coming from" (EC1). This has been a point that has long been maintained in the literature and this finding contributes to the transition research base (DEECD, 2009; Margetts, 2002; Peters, 2010; O'Kane, 2015) and complements Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory that considers the child at the centre of the different ecosystems. The prior-to-school educators felt particularly strongly that it is important to build on children's learning from their preschool years, but expressed some angst about how this is achieved - "I don't know whether they [Kindergarten teachers] want to read our reports" (EC4). Whilst the Kindergarten teachers agreed on the need to gain some understanding of children's current skill levels in the early weeks of Kindergarten, some mentioned individual reports, all considered the Best Start assessment as a valuable tool through which to achieve this. However, the effectiveness of this method has to be questioned when it is only a measure of the presence or absence of children's literacy and numeracy capabilities attained through a short diagnostic appraisal. Considering all the contemporary research literature that exists about 'ready schools' being responsive to the children attending and a shift away from the maturational model of readiness (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Graue, 2006; Noel, 2010) this indeed leads us to question whether schools are embracing this new readiness perspective.

It is difficult to comprehend how such an assessment can truly provide useful information about children's prior learning in relation to dispositions, strengths and interests that collectively reveal a more accurate picture of children's current understandings and development. This is particularly so for the growing number of children in NSW who speak English as a second or third language. If we are to take Broström's (2002) perspective that the fundamental goal of transition is to be that children feel 'suitable' in school, then as Brooker (2008) contends, an essential question to be asked is not 'what does the child know' but rather, is the child supported in employing his or her previous knowledge in the new learning environment. At the exosystem level of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework, indeed it must be considered whether our Australian government policies and related assessment documents are truly supporting and upholding the concept of the 'ready school' (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Graue, 2006). The 'school readiness' model is attractive to governments as it ostensibly supplies children to Kindergarten classrooms ready to conform to school routines and practices but fuels the tension that early childhood education is preparation for school rather than life. However, what is important is that schools prepare teachers and the Kindergarten learning environment to take into account what children bring to this new setting and so assist children to feel suitable, competent and experience a sense of continuity. The findings of this study indicate that teachers are not cognisant of the school's need to be ready for the child. If there is a mismatch between what knowledge and skills children bring to school with the expectations and values of the school itself then there is the potential for loss of continuity of learning and so children can be at risk of a problematic adjustment.

Also, the new NSW Transition to School Statement had not yet been introduced at the point of the current study's interview data collection, thus no references to this document were made. However, as completion of this newly introduced statement is not a mandatory requirement for early childhood teachers, it may be difficult to establish the extent of the uptake and whether the statement achieves its objectives. Thus, time will tell whether this document improves communication between the sectors and provides better transition support for

children entering school, and whether teachers in schools will be able to effectively interpret and use the content in it to provide continuity of learning for children. One foreseeable concern is that the statement is a form of unidirectional information delivery and does not constitute a more bi-directional and sustained form of contact between the two settings involving mesosystem interpersonal interactions as described in recent literature (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Noel, 2011). Perhaps this document will encourage teachers in schools to become more familiar with the EYLF and to consider avenues in creating sufficient similarity between the settings so that children can recognise their previously acquired skills and knowledge as being useful and valued.

6.3   Discussions of findings for Research Question Three: What factors influence prior-to-school educators and Kindergarten teachers' decision related to using play-based pedagogy in the transition process?

Influencing factors related to participant decision-making for using play-based pedagogy across the transition process are considered in the following section. Participants identified a number of internal and external elements that had a significant impact on whether they employed play-based pedagogy in their classroom practices. Some factors were positive forces whilst others were acknowledged as constraints. The findings suggest that the beliefs that teachers hold may not always resound in their practices. Particularly for the Kindergarten teachers it seemed that there were contextual factors that powerfully influenced their opinions toward play as barrier in the learning and teaching process. Hence, for the current study, inconsistencies between teacher beliefs and actions were largely due to external constraints. Many of the challenges that both groups recognised were distal, external constraints and outside of the immediate control of their setting. These featured heavily in the responses from both sides of the two educational sectors. It should be noted that the discussion of these factors is predominantly context-bound. The factors are relative to and affected by the

Australian economic, political, governmental, social and cultural milieu which reside in the macrosystem level of the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

6.3.1   Category One – Intrinsic factors

6.3.1.1 Personal knowledge

The results of this study indicated that both groups of participants identified intrinsic factors, which comprised of personal elements such as professional knowledge, experience and personal beliefs, as being influential to their decisions in using play-based pedagogy. In keeping with Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (2001), these qualities relate to the 'person' factors within his PPCT model. Intrinsic factors featured more in the responses of the prior-to-school participants than for the Kindergarten teachers perhaps because play-based pedagogy is at the heart of what they do every day in their practice and sits as a fundamental philosophical belief. This finding supports the extant literature about teacher pedagogical beliefs and their influence on teaching practices (Handal & Herrington, 2003; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Li, 2009; Trivette et al., 2012). There was agreement within both case studies where participants expressed their personal beliefs about a play-based approach – both in terms of rationales for its inclusion or exclusion in their programs.

Overall, participant orientation towards play was positive and valued, and they believed that "play works. It just works" (EC2). They related their views that "you do see the rewards and the enjoyment" (PT4) and also "just the learning that comes out of it" (PT3) but particularly for the Kindergarten participants, the challenges were overriding. One Kindergarten teacher recounted why play-based pedagogy is used minimally in her school day: "I think it is also my belief that now they're at school and they come to school to learn" (PT1) and added that "there is a certain amount of the day that I need to actually teach" (PT1). Hence, this perspective is in line with some research findings that highlight play and academic learning or outcomes being viewed as mutually exclusive (Ailwood, 2003; Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Stephen, 2010). A reason for this perspective could be that teachers

in schools may hold incomplete understandings of play-based pedagogy and so do not make the play-learning connection.

Common personal dimensions that the early childhood participants presented included "I think it's more my belief" (EC2) and their experience in "doing a play-based learning program" (EC1). These prior-to-school educators explained that "definitely research" (EC1) and theoretical knowledge "of what I know the benefits of play are" (EC3) and their own tertiary qualifications were similarly significant. They felt strongly that "if you know child development and you know how children learn, there's no other way you'd do it" (EC4). Furthermore, for these participants, their tertiary education contributed to their strengths in observational and recording skills. Additionally, they believed that it was important that "we observe children and we look at their strengths and interests" (EC3) and also "you do have to be a good observer…to be able to record the learning" (EC1) in order to plan for and enable play. The views of these educators reflect their beliefs that curriculum is constructed, learner-centred and individualised as opposed to being determined and mandated by a government syllabus document which prescribes the content and timeframe for learning such as in school contexts. The early childhood trained Kindergarten participant explained that previous experience in prior-to-school settings afforded her the confidence to offer play-based experiences in her Kindergarten classroom with the knowledge that children were engaged in enjoyable and meaningful learning. However, the provision of such experiences was not able to be fully realised in her school setting.

These characteristics identified by the prior-to-school educators are consistent with previous research findings which propose that beliefs about play practices are strongly related with foundational theoretical knowledge and training, particularly for teachers who hold university level qualifications (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; McMullen & Alat, 2002; Wen et al., 2011). Similar to McMullen and Alat's (2002) research, the current study also determined that specialised coursework in early childhood education and child development strongly contributed to influencing teachers' beliefs about their implementation of play-

based pedagogy. Paralleling the findings in Lord and McFarland's (2010) study, a possible reason for the discrepancy between the lack of stated influence of educational training between prior-to-school educators and Kindergarten teachers is that early childhood development knowledge does not feature strongly in primary teacher education courses.

6.3.2 *Category Two – Extrinsic factors*

6.3.2.1 Physical

Common external influences noted by both groups included physical design limitations within the classroom environment or the setting and so can be related to aspects that reside within the microsystem of the settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The Kindergarten teachers particularly focused on interior features of school buildings. Room sizes presented a constraint and participants stated that "to have a play-base you would need a huge room to set up for that" (PT1) because "it's such a small area, so your environment is a big obstacle" (PT3). They envisaged "it would be nice to have like a separate place…that would just be the ultimate" (PT2). Conversely, the prior-to-school educators perceived external features such as the layout of their setting which affected supervisory issues in terms of "we can't really do a lot of indoor/outdoor play" (EC3) or whether other groups of children already occupied the outside space. Such microsystem concerns and constraints mirror findings of Roskos and Neuman (2011) who maintain that when contemplating pedagogical approaches, considerations of the environment are fundamental.

6.3.2.2 Organisational/structural

Across the two case studies, microsystem constraints such as time featured strongly in numerous ways as a restriction or barrier to use of play-based pedagogy. The prior-to-school educators stated that "you have to have big blocks of time" (EC1) or "uninterrupted time" (EC4) to facilitate children's deep engagement in play. Nevertheless, extending on the findings of Sandberg and Pramling-Samuelsson (2003), the prior-to-school educators explained that within their time frame, daily routines plus incursions/excursions meant various interruptions to the

flow or continuity of children's play. This was similar for their school counterparts who echoed that "there are so many interruptions as well" (PT3). Classroom time-tabling issues featured in the descriptions of the Kindergarten teachers - "the timetable is so jam packed" (PT1), so that play "really is mandated by your timetable and what you could fit in" (PT4). Consequently, teachers were left with little time for play though they wished "it would be nice to do it for at least half an hour every day even" (PT2).

The lower ratios of adults to children in school contexts were cited by both groups as another organisational/structural challenge. The participants stated that without another staff member present in the room it was difficult to organise and manage play-based learning experiences in a school environment. The Kindergarten teachers explained that "it is one teacher and 24 children" (PT1) and so therefore "that would be another obstacle not having the extra support" (PT3). This was also a common suggestion among the preschool educators who offered "having an extra staff member if the funding is there in the Kindy class as well would be amazing" (EC2).

Lastly, exo- and macrosystem issues such as school targets and new school curricular interpretation burdens featured prominently as an obstacle to play-based pedagogy in the Kindergarten context. In line with findings of Ranz-Smith (2007), there was uniform agreement that curricular expectations impeded on their perception of viewing play as a curricular stronghold in children's learning. Despite personal espoused beliefs in play, accountability requirements impinged on their time and ability to implement pedagogies of play. The school participants reiterated that "we've got a whole lot of teachers that believe in play-based approach but we need to do things differently to boost literacy and numeracy skills" (PT4). In an evidence-based school climate play was minimal and they stressed that "all the assessments, it is a lot of pressure" (PT3) because "you're expected to get them to this level by the end of the year" (PT1). Extending on the findings of the Australian Government Department of Education (2014), the Alliance for High Quality Education in the Early Years of Schooling (2014), and the Australian Primary

Principals Association (2014), the new Australian curriculum was also targeted by the Kindergarten teachers as they could not find any explicit reference to pedagogy within it "because how much of that is around play?" (PT4). This was seen as a constraint in "that's not spelt out enough in the curriculum for me to justify to my boss why I've then got massive chunks of play" (PT2). These findings parallel the functional barriers identified in Kagan's (1990) research. Conversely, the new national curriculum framework for the preschool educators, the EYLF, was viewed positively as it advocates for the use of a play-based approach. Hence, the prior-to-school participants explained that this can help validate to others why this is a leading tool for teaching and learning in their setting.

6.3.2.3 Financial

Financial constraints in the form of availability of resources also featured strongly in participant responses. This was noted as a significant restriction for the Kindergarten teachers in that they felt they "just don't have the resources" (PT1) and "that takes money" (PT2). The prior-to-school educators concurred that "being well resourced probably is what it comes down to" (EC1). Exosystem factors such as financial issues related to socio-economic factors within the local community meant that for certain schools "we have to do things differently in our school because of our demographics. That's the reason why we do the things that we do." (PT4). As a result, play-based pedagogy was deemed a barrier to a strong focus on targeting the gap in literacy and numeracy skills for children from low socio-economic backgrounds in their first year of school. This participant reasoned that in other schools teachers would "be able to do more play-based things because children already come to school with a certain set of skills" (PT4).

6.3.2.4 Beliefs of others

Other related issues mentioned were parental expectations and their (mis)conceptions of play as overwhelmingly contributory challenges faced by both groups of participants. They remarked that parental beliefs ranged from issues about more emphasis on academics to a broad mistrust of the value of play-based pedagogy. There was a general view that much effort was needed to educate

families about the value of learning through play because "a lot of parents obviously want numbers and alphabet…introduced in these programs" (EC4). Particularly in a school context, participants felt the pressure to explain the learning evident in children's play so parental concerns were addressed such as "what are you doing with my child? Are they just playing all day?" (PT4). Prior-to-school educators explained "we have to really put a lot of emphasis on it and educate our families about why we're doing it" (EC1). There was a feeling that parents were "expecting a piece of work" (EC4) and so learning as a process not a product was key to explain. A shared concern between the two groups was about the focus parents have on visible outcomes and attainment of specific cognitive skills was apparent. This was particularly evident in the responses of the Kindergarten teachers where parents were reported to emphasise academic achievement and "expecting kids should be reading and things like that" (PT2) because "parents want to see results" (PT4). The teachers felt it was difficult to convince parents that allowing children to play was a positive element "even though there may be research to suggest that it might be" (PT4). Advocacy for play was a common element when explaining to families the learning that occurred "because they don't have that understanding" (PT3). The prior-to-school participants used these opportunities to promote play and "explain to them why it is different, and why we do what we do" (EC1).

Similar to the findings of Niesel and Griebel (2001), this study established that as transition approaches, parents' expectations become more focused on academic skills. The prior-to-school educators explained that parents feel pressured to prepare or 'make ready' their children for the first year of school in terms of academic gains. Likewise, Barbarin et al. (2008) and Tobin and Kurban (2010) found that pressure from parents for a stronger emphasis on academics in early learning settings was irrespective of socio-economic or EAL characteristics and this was evident across all research sites in the current study. These results are also consistent with data from more recent Australian literature such as that of Dockett (2011) and O'Gorman and Ailwood (2012) who also stated that teachers reported parental perceptions and attitudes as barriers to a play-based approach. Such views

emanate from the broader socio-political macrosystem influences of the dominant discourses of school-readiness and the emphasis of the literacy and numeracy agenda within the Australian education context. However, parental pressures such as these may be difficult to resist. Within early years education, there is a strong emphasis on families as partners in the care and education of their children. Those pressures are heightened, together with educators' own qualms and reservations and their professional obligation to respect family views and value their perspectives (Brooker, 2010). In the Australian context, a central tenet of the national guiding *EYLF* is that of partnerships with families particularly at transition times which reinforce educators' sense of responsibilities to honouring that shared decision making. Thus, it is during the transition process that tension can exist between teachers' beliefs in the value of play and their desire to respect the requirements and aspirations of their families. Furthermore, there is even a greater need to develop a shared understanding between families and teachers of the relationship between play and learning across the transition process.

Along with parent beliefs, participants also agreed that beliefs of colleagues in the workplace were significant. Prior-to-school educators focused on their work as team members and of the importance in a shared philosophy. They explained that "having all the educators with the same approach" (EC1) helped to support the inclusion of play because "you work as part of a team" (EC2). The advocacy of leaders in their settings helped to cement their own beliefs in play-based pedagogy because "a lot of my beliefs have stemmed off what she [director] tells me" (EC2). For the school teachers, creating a shared culture for the value of play was essential otherwise staff members would not "necessarily hold the same importance…for the same outcomes" (PT2). However, this was not always easy. One Kindergarten participant clarified that collegial opinions can pose a significant barrier. She explained that for many newly qualified school teachers, rationalisation of play as effective could pose a significant challenge, especially from supervising staff members who could "come past and judge me" (PT2).

In terms of other perceived barriers, societal and political beliefs about play and the misconceptions that are held by others drew strong agreement from both groups. This draws parallels to similar research findings about such external macrosystem forces (Alliance for High Quality Education in the Early Years of Schooling, 2014). Some of these stemmed from views held in the community or the wider socio-political sphere: "it can be politicians and it can be a lot of outside forces that don't really understand what a play-based curriculum is all about" (EC4). Certain misconceptions included that "some people see play as just this big mess" (EC3) or a general lack of understanding about its learning potential: "if people understood the learning that actually comes out of it I think it would be a lot more valued" (PT3). There was a general sense of frustration, particularly from the prior-to-school participants, about the need to defend the place of play in children's education. In the school context, teachers explained that "it's the way our education system is set up on a whole" (PT4) and felt that "it needs to be recognised a lot more in all schools" (PT3). This contributed to views held about the need to substantiate how children can learn through a play-based approach in schools: "it's about what evidence there is to suggest that there's a better way to do it" (PT4). One prior-to-school educator encapsulated the uphill struggle against the misconception of their professional identity that is linked with their work in the play-based approach: "I mean you'll still get people saying, aren't you lucky, you must have a lovely time sitting in the sandpit playing with the kids. Yes" (EC4).

While the prior-to-school educators reported a connection with the body of knowledge that shapes their profession, however on closer examination it seems that there exists some disconnect between their reported educational beliefs and the teaching practices when it comes to the transition process. Also, while the Kindergarten teachers expressed their belief in the general value of play, they were often unable to implement a play-based approach that was consistent with their beliefs. Thus, it appears that these educators are vulnerable to the influence of macrosystem and exosystem pressures from, and the perspectives of, the socio-political community. The current educational climate with its focus on academics and accountability places teachers in the position of either defending play or

bowing to such pressures with a resultant decrease in play and an increase in time for academic learning (Myck-Wayne, 2010).

6.4   Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in relation to the literature and theoretical framework. Findings from Research Question One revealed that teachers found play-based pedagogy a challenging term to define, and misconceptions and misunderstandings were uncovered in their explications of their various theories. However, the idealised notion of play was valued by all participants. In relation to Research Question Two, while pedagogic continuity was another difficult construct to conceptualise, teachers emphasised the discontinuity that exists between the two sectors of education and the need for greater complementarity to improve the transition to school process. Last, findings from Research Question Three highlighted the internal and external factors that influence teacher decisions to implement play-based pedagogy across the transition process. Overwhelmingly, the presence of external elements and pressures were nominated as substantial barriers. The next section presents the final chapter which concludes the research study. Significant findings together with recommendations and implications for policy and future research will be stated.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

"Teachers and parents often feel that play is important for young children, but do not have a clear sense of why it is important. We need to do more to get the word out"

(Nicolopoulou, 2010, p. 3)

Introduction

This chapter reviews the scope and purpose of the study, and presents a summary of significant findings that contribute to new knowledge. Implications for further research are identified, and recommendations made, with the aim to challenge thinking and conceptualisations of play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity, and to broaden knowledge for new directions in policy directives. Limitations of the study are also discussed.

7.1   Scope and purpose of the study

This exploratory case study examined prior-to-school and Kindergarten teacher beliefs about the use of play-based pedagogy to promote pedagogic continuity in the transition to formal schooling. The purpose was to provide an insight into teacher theories of play-based learning and teaching, including their perceived roles and influencing factors to implementation, plus their understandings of pedagogic continuity across the transition process. In examining these phenomena, the study aimed to determine similarities and differences among teacher perceptions in their constructions of play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity. Also, the intention was to contribute additional insight into understandings about these terms to help inform future professional development regarding the transition to school and future policy directions.

The study provided answers to the research questions through the findings that were grounded in the data obtained from in-depth interviews and

documentary sources. Interviews with the selected sample provided detailed analysis and a richer understanding of how teachers' perceptions are actually translated into practice. An examination of the different curriculum documents used in the two sectors helped to ascertain whether they impeded or facilitated the implementation of play-based pedagogy across the transition process. What became evident was the complex nature of the transition to school and the tensions and dilemmas that exist for teachers involved in this process. Whilst teacher beliefs did vary, the similarities within the two groups of participants formed a shared discourse and the findings offer an Australian perspective of teachers' theories of play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity. The bio-ecological model was presented as a framework through which the proximal processes of the interactions between the teachers across the transition process could be viewed and examined, and helped to identify the critical elements of these interactions that children experience.

7.2   Significance of research findings

7.2.1   *Towards a new definition for play-based pedagogy*

The first key finding that makes a contribution to new knowledge is that there is no consensus of a definition of play-based pedagogy. This study provides insight into the difficulty for teachers to define and conceptualise this term, and that contexts matter significantly in teaching, in that they either enable or constrain play-based pedagogy in practice. Participant descriptions exposed inconsistencies in definitions and in their implementation of play-based pedagogy. Furthermore, whilst the current national policy document, the *EYLF*, mandates this pedagogical approach in prior-to-school settings, it leaves teachers in that sector to decide how best to interpret this mandate into practice. Lack of a clear definition within this document gives rise to challenges in teachers' understandings of play-based pedagogy, the role they assume within this approach, and how their involvement affects children's learning. Whilst the notion of play was valued by teachers in both settings, and for the prior-to-school educators is a pedagogical priority, in the

classrooms of Kindergarten teachers who operate under the auspices of the *Australian Curriculum*, teaching through play is limited, constrained or marginalised. Misinterpretations and misunderstandings about play-based pedagogy became evident in participant descriptions, particularly in regards to meaningful participation in children's play.

The current study identified that teacher beliefs, shaped by professional training, knowledge and experience, are significant factors for their inclinations either toward or away from implementing a play-based approach. Prior-to-school educator beliefs revealed a strong commitment to play-based pedagogy and the importance of a more relational, responsive and interactional perspective of the adult's involvement. However, they were more comfortable and confident describing conditions for learning than conditions for teaching. There was a degree of hesitation in their descriptions of their role, particularly regarding any mentioning of intentional teaching, despite this being explicitly described in the *EYLF*. The dominance of low intervention or supporting behaviours in prior-to-school educator descriptions signified the primacy of their view of discovery, experiential play-based learning and the tendency toward more passive roles in their teaching practice.

Kindergarten teacher beliefs revealed that they valued idealised notions of play but misunderstood play-based pedagogy. Misinterpretations of play-based pedagogy translated into misunderstandings about their role within this. Play in most cases was misconceived as being simplistic in nature and used separately from actual learning. Hence, descriptions of their role featured either supervisory duties or instructive, directive behaviours characteristic of formal school teaching practices.   A shift in how play is viewed in the early years of school is required so that teachers can understand and appreciate how children's play continues to develop and mature, how play and learning are intertwined, and to understand the proactive, interactional role that teachers have in promoting its complexity.

When examining the *EYLF* more closely, definitions of play-based learning, pedagogy, involvement, and intentional teaching are all provided separately.

206

Educators working in early childhood settings struggle to draw together these components to articulate, interpret, and translate these descriptions into practice to form a clear and cohesive understanding of their role in teaching through play. The findings from the current study suggest the need to rethink existing understandings of the term play-based pedagogy so that teachers can move beyond conceptualisations of their role from predominantly supportive behaviours to more mediational interactions and reflective practices. Thus, of particular significance is how play-based learning sits together with intentional teaching. Specific attention to the proactive, intentional role of the educator is required to help strengthen professional identity and professional vocabulary. This would provide a clear articulation of quality teaching in practice. This necessitates the creation of a shared understanding from which teachers can work that focuses on a relational and interactional pedagogy. What is essential, in view of a bio-ecological perspective, is the emphasis on the importance of the quality of interaction, the proximal processes, between the adult and child.

Thus, an operational definition is required that highlights the intentional pedagogical role of the teacher that focuses on the nature of involvement, while acknowledging the child as an active collaborator and contributor in the learning process. This places intentional teaching as a vital component of a pedagogy centred on learning through play and moves beyond the binary of either play-based learning or intentional teaching. Teacher intentionality does not imply more teacher control or direction. Instead, it reveals the complexity of the role and pedagogical expertise required to ensure that the conditions for quality of learning are present so that children can make sense and construct meaning from their play. In doing so, early years teachers will be able to draw on this definition to confidently articulate and explain their specific role within play-based pedagogy and to proclaim its benefits.

In response to the findings about misunderstandings and misconceptions of play-based pedagogy, the current research proposes a new definition of play-based pedagogy:

Responsive, reflective educators provide a balance of child-directed and adult-guided purposeful and meaningful play possibilities to support and extend children's thinking and learning based on their inquiries and interests. Educators co-construct knowledge with children, in both planned and spontaneous opportunities, achieved through the use of intentional teaching strategies that are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful to promote sustained shared thinking and high quality verbal interactions.

If play-based pedagogy is to be recognised as a legitimate and valued pedagogy in the early years of school, and if teachers in both sectors are to commit to a play-based curriculum across early years education, a common understanding of this term and what it looks like in practice is needed. Challenging assumptions about play-based pedagogy involves an understanding that if play affords valuable contexts for learning, then it follows that it must also provide valuable contexts for teaching, and so meaningful participation on the part of the adult is central to this understanding. Hence, a clear definition will afford early years educators the ability to articulate the value of high-quality play-based learning environments and responsive intentional interactions in which adults engage within those settings to promote and extend children's learning and conceptual understandings. Additionally, teachers in both sectors could share a common language in discussions of children's transitions to school.

7.2.2   *Reconceptualising 'ready schools' and an early years continuum*

Another key finding is that teachers in the current study found pedagogic continuity a challenging concept to define, but all stressed the importance of the need for continuity across the transition to school. The findings contribute to evidence that teachers believe the transition to the first year of formal schooling could be more effective and smoother, and that continuity and collaboration between the two sectors is limited. Even though the present research base provides extensive suggestions for effective transitions, a contribution to new knowledge from this study is that discontinuity was an ever present theme in teachers'

descriptions of the transition process and the disjuncture between these two environments considered too extreme. The shock of formal learning expectations was highlighted as a major source of discontinuity and so consequently, the current study findings recommend that the concept of 'ready schools' needs to be revisited and redefined.

What was significant in the responses of the participants was the presence of a hierarchical relationship with strong notions of school readiness framing constructs of pedagogic continuity. Reported academic push-down pressures are driving the 'schoolification' of prior-to-school settings, and in schools, changing the landscape of the first year of school. The reported overcrowded curriculum burdens and accountability measures have driven play-based learning and teaching possibilities to the sidelines. Findings from the current study confirm the importance of the first year of formal school to be recognised as a very important foundational transition phase with the need for pedagogic continuity across this process to help alleviate the aforementioned tensions and reduce pedagogic misalignment. Suggestions provided by the participants included using play as a transition bridge and the current study proposes viewing this as a graduated, longer transition timeframe rather than as a time-limited bridging change event. Hence, what is important is to move beyond considerations about pedagogic continuity in terms of an initial adjustment to school. This requires a shift in conceptualisations away from thinking about unilateral communication pathways, short-term orientation or induction events, or preparatory transition activities to pedagogic continuity as a long term, multi-year process with a focus on a shared pedagogical approach. Teachers in both sectors need to build an understanding of how to best connect the play-based imperatives of the *EYLF* with the *Australian Curriculum* so that pedagogic continuity can be realised to help smooth the transition to school. There is an argument for thinking about ECEC and early years schooling as two parts of the same continuum which spans from birth to eight years of age, rather than framing prior-to-school experiences and formal schooling as two distinct and separate events in children's lives. Alignment between the two national guiding curriculum documents, the *EYLF* and the *Australian Curriculum*, could be

achieved through a shared pedagogical approach, together with a stronger focus on the transition to school in the *Australian Curriculum*. The research literature strongly indicates the importance of maintaining a child-centred, developmentally appropriate approach with an emphasis on play-based learning and intentionality in teachers' use of strategies in early years education and emerging studies now provide convincing evidence of the benefits of play-based pedagogy in the first years of school.

Thus, it is suggested that the concept of 'ready schools' be redefined to incorporate the introduction of play-based pedagogy as the predominant pedagogy in the early years of school. This would be in order to provide continuity in children's learning and a less formal approach to teaching that acknowledges, values and builds on children's prior experiences. Indeed, new learning experiences are most effective when they are linked to familiar understandings. What is proposed is something similar to the framework that currently exists in the state of Victoria and their *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (2009)* but on a national level. This would be a common framework for all early years teachers which would cover birth to age eight years - an extension of the *EYLF* into the early years of school until Year 3. The provision for professional development opportunities for teachers in schools would also be required to learn about the *EYLF*, play-based pedagogy, and a play-based curriculum within the early years of school. The commitment to a play-based approach in the school context lies in teachers' knowledge, understanding and acceptance of play-based pedagogy. A strong focus on the transition to school would guide prior-to-school educators and teachers working in schools with children up to Year 3. Readiness concerns and anxieties could be significantly reduced rather than the current perceived role of prior-to-school settings in preparing children for formal schooling. This would support a shift toward maintaining a strengths-based approach and a strong and equal partnership between the two sectors in supporting children's transitions. A key aspect of 'ready schools' would be to embrace the provision of developmentally appropriate, student-centred meaningful learning opportunities through well-planned, challenging play and high quality teaching. Thus, rather than children

being shaped to fit the school, the new school or class accommodates, values and builds on the strengths, skills and interests of their new entrant children.

7.2.3   *Macro- and exosystem pressures limiting implementation of play-based pedagogy*

The last significant finding that contributes to new knowledge is that constraining external factors such as misconceptions and misunderstandings of play-based pedagogy. Perceptions held within societal views and attitudes that include families, community members, school staff and principals, and the government sector were identified as prominent in terms of hindering teachers' ability to implementing a play-based approach across the transition to school. Teachers in both case studies expressed the substantial tensions and challenges encountered resulting from parental mind-sets, school staff standpoints, and community outlooks about the perceived minimal worth of play-based pedagogy. Such pressure from external sources contributes to the intensification of more academically oriented, didactic teaching practices, particularly in regard to the transition to school phase. This leaves early childhood trained teachers in an almost professionally isolated vacuum, alone in their role as advocates for the benefits of play-based pedagogy in early years education.

Seen within the theoretical framework of this study, at the exosystem level, these results should then inform policy decisions concerning appropriate pedagogical approaches in early years education. Discussions and advocacy at the policy level should revolve around viewing the transition to school years as a critical period for high quality teaching and learning environments. Even though the last decade has seen an unprecedented focus on ECEC at the policy level in Australia based on the recognition of the importance of the early years, there is still much to be done to expand and restructure policy and public perceptions of early years education, particularly in regards to high quality teaching and play-based pedagogy. The future of the field of early childhood education is being shaped more by business leaders and economists with little input from teachers in determining policy and practice. Exosystem demands from policy makers can alter the microsystem practices of teachers in early years education and schooling with

pressure to perform by enacting scripted curricula. Also, the current emphasis in policy documents on literacy and numeracy skill development within the first year of Australian schools together with accountability demands and student performance measures produce high-stakes learning environments where teachers turn to less developmentally appropriate practices.

In order to counter these barriers, it is imperative that policy makers develop a stronger understanding of the value of play-based pedagogy in early years education and how this relates to academic learning and the accountability structure in the school context. Prior-to-school educators and Kindergarten teachers can support children's transitions on an individual level, but it is important also to advocate for and support wider changes at the exo- and macro-system levels. Hence, it is recommended that advocacy occurs from the microsystem level; a 'push-up' from teachers in both sectors to traverse into the macrosystem by means of a shared, cohesive operational definition so that is it clear what it is they are advocating. This operational definition should be prominent and cited in both curriculum documents to provide a common, shared understanding. Hence, a deeper grasp of play-based pedagogy by policy makers would lead to greater support in schools to make provisions to overcome other reported barriers such as child-teacher ratios that would then make it possible to implement a true play-based approach. School policies and guidelines will not change until there is the directive to do so at the policy level.

7.3   Limitations

The study had several limitations. First, it included a purposive sample of participants from a Sydney region. While the trends identified within the current study may provide useful conclusions for all educators involved in transitioning children into formal schooling, the findings will not necessarily all be transferable beyond the case study settings due to the qualitative nature of the research. However, interviews with the selected sample provided in-depth analysis and a stronger understanding of how teachers' beliefs influence conceptualisations of

play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity. Second, the sample size was small and so the study did not claim generalisability across other populations of teachers but begins the conversation about teachers' beliefs about the use of play-based pedagogy to promote pedagogic continuity across the transition process. The decision to limit the number of participants to eight teachers was to ensure manageability of the study yet yield enough data for verification of trustworthiness and authenticity as data saturation was reached. Thus, it is possible for other researchers to use the findings of this study to gain practical and valuable insights on the research topic, guided by the audit trail and rich contextual descriptions of the study.

Furthermore, the study relied on teacher self-report not on directly observed behaviours. Agreements and consistencies within and across the case responses provided some measure of triangulation for individual participants' reported practices. Therefore, as data saturation was reached, the results did provide evidence that could be used to inform practice across the transition process and in professional development about this topic. Also, it was assumed that the early childhood trained educators were familiar with the *EYLF*, however there were limited understandings for how this influenced their role. Nevertheless, the study was undertaken with trustworthiness and authenticity, so the findings may prove useful to other contexts. Last, the issue of self-reports and researcher bias may be a possible limitation but rigour was ensured in the design, the data gathering phase and in the data analysis.

7.4   Implications for further research

Further study, both qualitative and quantitative would be needed to establish the extent of key findings more broadly. Whilst the research conducted in the current study provides a snapshot into beliefs of teachers about the transition to school as it pertains to the NSW context, it is clear from the findings that misunderstandings of play-based pedagogy and pedagogic continuity warrant a deeper exploration of these constructs.

Currently around Australia, there are a number of separate initiatives related to improving the transition to school. In the state of Victoria there is a mandatory Transition Learning and Development Statement and the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* that specifically addresses the transition to school. In NSW a voluntary Transition to School Statement in NSW has been introduced. Queensland has adopted a continua and transition statement which is completed by ECEC services and made available to parents for their own records; parents may then choose to pass this on to the school. In addition, Transitions, Partnerships and Innovation officers who work with ECEC services and schools to promote collaboration on local transition-to-school programs have been employed across the state. Therefore, it is recommended that ongoing evaluation of these initiatives be undertaken in the form of future research directions to be able to inform their role in improving the effectiveness of transitions to school in the Australian context.

At present, there exists limited examination in research and in policy about the differences in the constructs of play and play-based pedagogy held by teachers. Whilst the notion of play has been researched extensively, it is suggested that further research be carried out to provide more consistent data to investigate the implementation of play-based pedagogy within the Australian educational context and to identify teachers' understandings of their roles and how play-based learning intersects with intentionality. More needs to be done in exploring how play-based approaches are enacted in the early years of school. Future research in this area can provide valuable information as to how curriculum and play-based pedagogy meet and shape teachers' perspectives, as well as how the current *Australian Curriculum* could be transformed to better support young children's learning across the transition to school.

7.5   Final words

If we truly desire more effective transitions to school, policy makers and researchers alike must re-examine existing understandings and constructs of play-

based pedagogy which would alter and ameliorate current pedagogic discontinuity as experienced by children in their passage to formal schooling, otherwise, play will be forever 'lost in transition'.

REFERENCES

Ackerman, D., & Barnett, W. (2005). *Prepared for Kindergarten: What does 'readiness' mean?* New Brunswick, USA: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Ackesjö, H. (2013a). Children crossing borders: School visits as initial incorporation rites in transition to preschool class. *International Journal of Early Childhood, 45*(3), 387-410.

Ackesjö, H. (2013b, August). *Mind the gap! Children's transition from preschool to school: The Swedish example*. Paper presented at the EECERA conference in Tallin, Estonia.

Ailwood, J. (2003). Governing early childhood education through play. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 4*(3), 286-299.

Alatalo, T., Meier, J., & Frank, E. (2016). Transition between Swedish preschool and preschool class: A question about interweaving care and knowledge. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 44*(2), 155–167.

Alcock, S., & Haggerty, M. (2013). Recent policy developments and the "schoolification" of early childhood care and education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Early Childhood Folio, 17*(2), 21-26.

Aldridge, J., Kohler, M., Kilgo, J., & Christensen, L. (2012). Among the periodicals: What is the value of play? *Childhood Education, 88*(3), 201-204.

Alexander, R. (1999). Culture in pedagogy, pedagogy across cultures. In R. Alexander, P. Broadfoot, & D. Phillips (Eds.), *Learning from comparing: New directions in comparative educational research. Volume 1. Contexts, classrooms and outcomes* (pp. 149–80). Oxford, UK: Symposium Books.

Alexander, R. (2004). Still no pedagogy? Principle, pragmatism and compliance in primary education. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 34*(1), 7-33.

Alexander, R. (2008). *Education for all, the quality imperative and the problem of pedagogy. Research Monograph No. 20.* London, UK: University of London.

Alexander, R. (2015). Teaching and learning for all? The quality imperative revisited. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 250-258.

Alexander, K., & Entwisle, D. (1988). Achievement in the first two years of school: Patterns and processes. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 53*(2), 1-157, Serial No. 218.

Alliance for High Quality Education in the Early Years of Schooling. (2014). *Discussion Paper 1: A call for high quality early childhood education in the early years of school in Western Australia.*

Anderson, R. (2010). Incorporating diversity in preparing children for school: An Australian perspective. *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations, 10*(1), 265–277.

Arnold, C., Bartlett, K., Gowani, S., & Merali, R. (2006). Is everybody ready? Readiness, transition and continuity: Reflections and moving forward. *Background Paper for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007.* Aga Khan Foundation.

Arndt, A., Rothe, A., Urban, M., & Werning, R. (2013). Supporting and stimulating the learning of socioeconomically disadvantaged children–perspectives of parents and educators in the transition from preschool to primary school. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 21*(1), 23-38.

Ashiabi, G. (2007). Play in the preschool classroom: Its socioemotional significance and the teacher's role in play, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(2), 199-207. doi.org/10.1007/s10643-007-01658

Ashton, J., Woodrow, C., Johnston, C., Wangmann, J., Singh, L., & James, T. (2008). Partnerships in learning: Linking early childhood services, families, and schools for optimal development. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 33*(2), 10-16.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011a). *Childhood education and care, Australia, 2011* (No. 4402.0). Canberra, AUS: Author. Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011b). *Schools, Australia, 2011* (No. 4221.0). Canberra, AUS: Author. Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2015). *Preschool education, Australia, 2015* (No. 4240.0). Canberra, AUS: Author. Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). (n.d.). *Information sheet: National Quality Framework - Who is covered*. Canberra, ACT: Author.

Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2012). *General capabilities in the Australian curriculum*. Retrieved from http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/general-capabilities

Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2015). *Australian Curriculum.* Retrieved from http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au

Australian Government Department of Education. (2014). *Review of the Australian curriculum: Initial Australian government response (Final Report).* Canberra, AUS: Author.

Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA). (2014). *The overcrowded primary curriculum: A way forward.* Retrieved from https://www.appa.asn.au/wpcontent/uploads/2015/.../Overcrowded-primary-curriculum.pdf

Barbarin, O., Early, D., Clifford, R., Bryant, D., Frome, P., Burchinal, M., Howes, C., & Pianta, R. (2008). Parental conceptions of school readiness: Relation to ethnicity, socioeconomic status,

and children's skills. *Early Education and Development, 19*(5), 671-701. doi: 10.1080/10409280802375257

Barblett, L. (2010). Why play-based learning? *Every Child, 16*(3), 4-5.

Basit, T. (2010). *Conducting research in educational contexts.* London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bassok, D., Latham, S., & Rorem, A. (2016). Is Kindergarten the new first grade? *AERA Open, 1*(4), 1-31. doi: 10.1177/2332858415616358

Bennett, J. (2013). A response from the co-author of 'a strong and equal partnership'. In P. Moss (Ed.), *Early childhood and compulsory education: Reconceptualising the relationship* (pp. 52–71). London, UK: Routledge.

Bennett, N., Wood, L., & Rogers, S. (1997). *Teaching through play: Teachers' thinking and classroom practice*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Bentley-Williams, R., & Butterfield, N. (1996). Transition from early intervention to school: A family focussed view of the issues involved. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 20*(2), 17-28.

Binstadt, M. (2010). Ready together – Transition to school program effecting positive outcomes for children and their families in the Inala to Ipswich area. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood, 4*, 37-44.

Bodrova, E. (2008). Make-believe play versus academic skills: A Vygotskian approach to today's dilemma of early childhood education. *European Early Childhood Education Research, 16*(3), 357– 69.

Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. (2003). The importance of being playful. *Educational Leadership*, *60*(7), 50-53.

Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. (2010). Curriculum and play in early child development. In R. Tremblay, M. Boivin, & R. DeV. Peters (Eds.), *Encyclopedia on early childhood development* (pp. 1-6). Montreal, Canada: Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development and Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development.

Boethel, M. (2004). *Readiness: School, family & community connections*. Austin, USA: National Centre for Family & Community Connections with Schools.

Bogard, K., & Takanishi, R. (2005). PK-3: An aligned and coordinated approach to education for children 3 to 8 years old. *Social Policy Report, XIX (III).* Society for Research in Child Development, Ann Arbor, USA.

Boyle, T., & Grieshaber, S. (2013). Teacher understandings of orientation and transition programs from action research in five schools. *International Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum, 19*(3), 15-27.

Boyle, T., & Petriwskyj, A. (2014). Transitions to school: reframing professional relationships. *Early Years, 34*(4), 392-404.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Bredekamp, S. (Ed.). (1987). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Bredekamp, S., & Copple, C. (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs,* (Rev. ed.). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Bredekamp, S. (2010). Aligning curriculum and teaching: A child-focused approach. In S. Kagan & K. Tarrant (Eds.), *Transitions for young children: Creating connections across early childhood systems* (pp. 135-160). Maryland, USA: Paul H. Brookes.

Briggs, M., & Hansen, A. (2012). *Play-based learning in the primary classroom*. Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage.

Britt, C., & Sumsion, J. (2003). Within the borderlands: Beginning early childhood teachers in primary schools. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *4(2),* 115-136.

Britto, P., Yoshikawa, H., & Boller, K. (2011). Quality of early childhood development programs in global contexts: Rationale for investment, conceptual framework and implications for equity. *Social Policy Report, 25*(2), 1-31.

Broadhead, P. (2010). Cooperative play and learning from nursery to year one. In P. Broadhead, J. Howard, & E. Wood (Eds.), *Play and learning in the early years* (pp. 43-60). London, UK: Sage.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward and experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*(7), 513-531.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development. *Developmental Psychology, 22*(6), 723-742.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the development of children*, 2, 37-43.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1995). Developmental ecology through space and time: A future perspective. In P. Moen, G. Elder, Jr., & K. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 619-647). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2001). The bioecological theory of human development. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, 10,* (pp. 6963-6970). New York, USA: Elsevier.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Ceci, S. (1994). Nature-nurture reconceptualized: A bioecological model. *Psychological Review, 101*(4), 568-586.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In W. Damon & R. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology Volume 1: Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 993 –1028). New York, USA: Wiley.

Bronfenbrenner U., & Morris, P. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In W. Damon & R. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology Volume 1: Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 793–828). Hoboken, USA: Wiley.

Brooker, L. (2008). *Supporting transitions in the early years*. Maidenhead, UK: McGraw-Hill Education.

Brooker, L. (2010). Learning to play in a cultural context. In P. Broadhead, J. Howard, & E. Wood (Eds.), *Play and learning in the early years: From research to practice* (pp. 27-42). London, UK: Sage.

Brooker, L. (2011). Taking play seriously. In S. Rogers (Ed.), *Rethinking play and pedagogy in early childhood education: Concepts, contexts and cultures* (pp. 152-164). London, UK: Routledge.

Brooker, L., & Edwards, S. (2010). Introduction: From challenging to engaging play. In L. Brooker & S. Edwards (Eds.), *Engaging play* (pp. 1-10). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Broström, S. (2002). Communication and continuity in the transition from kindergarten to school. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *Transitions in the early years: Debating continuity and progressing for young children in early education* (pp. 51-63). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Broström, S. (2005). Transition problems and play as transitory activity. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 30*(3), 17-25.

Broström, S. (2013). Play as the main road in children's transition to school. In O. Lillemyr, S. Dockett, & B. Perry (Eds.), *Varied perspectives on play and learning: Theory and research on early years education* (pp. 37-53). Charlotte, USA: Information Age Publishing.

Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education.* Harvard, USA: Harvard University Press.

Bunting, C. (1984). Dimensionality of teacher education beliefs: An exploratory study. *Journal of Experimental Education, 52*(4), 195-198.

Carida, H. (2011). Planning and implementing an educational programme for the smooth transition from kindergarten to primary school: The Greek project in all-day kindergartens. *The Curriculum Journal, 22*(1), 77–92.

References

Carter, S., & Little, M. (2007). Justifying knowledge, justifying method, taking action: Epistemologies, methodologies, and methods in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, *17*(10), 1316-1328. doi: 10.1177/1049732307306927

Cassidy, D., & Lawrence, J. (2000). Teachers' beliefs: The "whys" behind the "how tos" in child care classrooms. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 14*(2), 193-204.

Cassidy, M. (2005). 'They do it anyway': A study of Primary 1 teachers' perceptions of children's transition into primary education. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 25*(2), 143-153. doi.org/10.1080/09575140500127923

Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH). (2006). *Quality in children's services-Policy Brief No. 2, Translating early childhood research evidence to inform policy and practice.* Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital. Retrieved from www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB2_

Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH). (2008). *Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years services-Policy Brief No. 11, Translating early childhood research evidence to inform policy and practice.* Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital. Retrieved from www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB11_Transition_to_school.pdf

Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH). (2014). *The future of early childhood education and care services in Australia-Policy Brief No. 26, Synthesising research evidence to inform decision making.* Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital. doi: 10.4225/50/5578DA5BA7DCE

Centre for Community Child Health and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. (2009). *A snapshot of early childhood development in Australia: Australian early development index (AEDI) National Report 2009*. Canberra: Australian Government.

Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (CEIEC). (2008). *Transition: A positive start to school: Literature Review.* Melbourne, AUS: The University of Melbourne: Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood.

Chan, W. (2010). The transition from kindergarten to primary school, as experienced by teachers, parents and children in Hong Kong. *Early Child Development and Care, 180*(7), 973–993.

Chung, S., & Walsh, D. (2000). Unpacking child-centredness: A history of meanings. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 32*(2), 215-234.

Clark, P., & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, E. (2008). Ensuring school readiness through a successful transition to kindergarten: The Indiana ready schools initiative. *Childhood Education, 84*(5), 287-293. doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2008.10523026

Cleave, S., Jowett, S., & Bate, M. (1982). *And so to school. A study of continuity from pre-school to infant school*. Berkshire, UK: NFER- Nelson.

Clyde, M. (1995). *Concluding the debate: Mind games–what DAP means to me.* In M. Fleer (Ed.), *DAPcentrism: Challenging developmentally appropriate practices* (pp. 108-116)*.* Canberra, AUS: Australian Early Childhood Association.

Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG). (2008). *National partnership agreement on early childhood education.* Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.au/national-partnership-agreements

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education.* Milton Park, UK: Routledge.

Collie, L., Willis, F., Paine, C., & Windsor, C. (2007). Working together for children: Strengthening transition pathways. *Education in Rural Australia*, *17*(2), 81-93.

Colliver, J. (2012). The five debates: Simplifying the contemporary play literature. *Early Childhood Folio*, *16*(1), 15-21.

Connor, J. (2010). Talking about 'play'. *The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program (EYLFPLP) e-Newsletter No. 1*. Retrieved from http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfplp

Connor, J. (2011). Building on what children know. *Every Child, 17*(1), 6-7.

Connor, J. (2012). *Foundations for learning: Relationships between the early years learning framework and the Australian Curriculum.* An ECA & ACARA Paper. Retrieved from www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pdf/ECA_ACARA_Foundations_Paper/ECA_ACARA _Foundations_Paper_FINAL.pdf

Cooney, M., Gupton, P., & O'Laughlin, M. (2000). Blurring the lines of play and work to create blended classroom experiences. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 27*(3), 165-171.

Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Cousin, G. (2005). Case study research. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 29*(3), 421-427.

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage.

Cross, T. (1995). *The early childhood curriculum debate.* In M. Fleer (Ed.), *DAPcentrism: Challenging developmentally appropriate practices* (pp. 88-108)*.* Canberra, AUS: Australian Early Childhood Association.

Curwood, J. (2007). What happened to Kindergarten? *Instructor, 117*(1), 28-30.

Dahlberg, G., & Lenz-Taguchi, H. (1994). *Förskola och skola – om två skilda traditioner och om visionen om en mötesplats* (Preschool and school – two different traditions and the vision of a meeting place). Stockholm, Sweden: HLS Förlag.

Dail, A., & McGee, L. (2008). Transition to kindergarten: Reaching back to preschoolers and parents through shared summer school. *Childhood Education*, *84*(5), 305-310. doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2008.10523031

Denscombe, M. (2010). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects.* Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2013). *The landscape of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). (2009). *Transition: A positive start to school resource kit.* Melbourne, AUS: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Melbourne.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*. Canberra, AUS: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Documents/Final%20EY LF%20Framework%20Report%20-%20WEB.pdf

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2010). *Educators belonging, being and becoming: Educators' guide to the early years learning framework for Australia.* Canberra, AUS: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Documents/EYLF_Ed_G uide.pdf

Department of Education and Training, N.S.W. (November 2005). *Report of the consultations of future directions for public education and training.* Retrieved from http://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/reviews/futureproject/report/z_futuresreport .pdf

Department of Education and Training, Victoria State Government. (2016). *Victorian early years learning and development framework.* Melbourne, AUS: Author. Retrieved from http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework. pdf

Department of Education, Training and Employment, South Australia. (2001). *South Australian curriculum, standard and accountability framework.* Adelaide, AUS: Author.

Devlin, R. (2012). Valuing play: The early years learning framework in schools. *Every Child*, *18(1)*, 6–7.

DiBello, L., & Neuharth-Pritchett, S. (2008). Perspectives on school readiness and pre-kindergarten programs: An introduction. *Childhood Education, 84*(5), 256-259. doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2008.10523021

Di Santo, A., & Berman, R. (2012). Beyond the preschool years: Children's perceptions about starting kindergarten. *Children and Society, 26*(6), 469–479. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2011.00360.x

Dockett, S. (2011). The challenge of play for early childhood educators. In S. Rogers (Ed.), *Rethinking play and pedagogy in early childhood education: Concepts, contexts and cultures* (pp. 32-47). New York, USA: Routledge.

Dockett, S., & Fleer, M. (2002). *Play and pedagogy in early childhood: Bending the rules*. South Melbourne, AUS: Thomson.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (1999). Starting school: What do the children say? *Early Child Development and Care, 159*(1), 107-119. doi.org/10.1080/0300443991590109

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2001). Starting school: Effective transitions. *Early Childhood Research and Practice, 3*(2). Retrieved from http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v3n2/dockett.html

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2003). The transition to school: What's important? *Educational Leadership*, *60*(7), 30-33.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2004). What makes a successful transition to school? Views of Australian parents and teachers. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 12*(3), 217-230. doi.org/10.1080/0966976042000268690

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2005a). Starting school in Australia is 'a bit safer, a lot easier and more relaxing:' Issues for families and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *International Journal of Research and Development, 25*(3), 271-281.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2005b). Researching with children: Insights from the starting school research project. *Early Child Development and Care, 175*(6), 507–521. doi.org/10.1080/03004430500131312

Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2007a). Children's transition to school: Changing expectations. In A.-W. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.), *Informing transitions in the early years: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 92-106). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2007b). *Transitions to school: Perceptions, expectations, experiences.* Sydney, AUS: University of New South Wales Press.

Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2008). Starting school: A community endeavour. *Childhood Education, 84*(5), 274-280. doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2008.10523024

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2009). Readiness for school: A relational construct. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 34*(1), 20-26.

References

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2012a). Continuity and change as children start school. *Frontiers of Education in China, 7*(1), 5–32.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2012b). "In Kindy you don't get taught": Continuity and change as children start school. *Frontiers of Education in China, 7*(1), 5-32. doi.org/10.3868/sl 10-001-012-0002-8

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2013). Trends and tensions: Australian and international research about starting school. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, *21*(2-3), 163-177.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2014). *Continuity of learning: A resource to support effective transition to school and school age care.* Canberra, AUS: Australian Government Department of Education.

Dockett, S., Perry, B., Campbell, H., Hard, L., Kearney, E., & Taffe, R. (2007). Early years learning and curriculum. Reconceptualising Reception: Continuity of learning. *Early Years Learning and Curriculum Continuity Project.* Department of Education and Children's Services of South Australia.

Dockett, S., Perry, B., & Kearney, E. (2010). *School readiness: What does it mean for Indigenous children, families, schools and communities?* (Issues Paper No. 2). Melbourne, AUS: Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.

Doherty, G. (2007, January). *Conception to age 6: The foundation of school-readiness.* Paper presented at The Learning Partnership's Champions of Public Education across Canada: Partners in Action – Early Years Conference, Toronto.

Donaghue, H. (2003). An instrument to elicit teachers' beliefs and assumptions. *English Language Teachers Journal, 57*(4), 344-351.

Dowling, A., & O'Malley, K. (2009). *Preschool education in Australia.* Camberwell, AUS: Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

Dulfer, N., Rice, S., & Polesel, J. (2012). *The experience of education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families: An educator's perspective*. Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney.

Duncan, G., Claessens, A., Huston, A., Pagani, L., Engel, M., Sexton, H. et al. (2007). School readiness and later achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, *43*(6), 1428-1446.

Dunlop, A.-W. (2003). Bridging early educational transitions in learning through children's agency. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, Themed Monograph, 67-86*.

Dunlop, A.-W. (2007). Bridging research, policy and practice. In A.-W. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.). *Informing transitions in the early years* (pp. 152-168). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Dunlop, A.-W. (2013). Curriculum as a tool for change in transitions practices. In K. Margetts & A. Keinig (Eds.), *International perspectives on transition to school: Reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice* (pp. 135-145). New York, USA: Routledge.

Dunlop, A.-W., & Fabian, H. (2002). Conclusions: Debating transitions, continuity and progression in the early years. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *Transitions in the early years: Debating continuity and progression for children in early education* (pp. 146-154). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Dunlop, A.-W., & Fabian, H. (2007). *Informing transition in the early years: Research, policy and practice.* Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Early, D., Bryant, D., Pianta R., Clifford R., Burchinal, M., Ritchie, S., Howes, C., & Barbarin, O. (2006). Are teachers' education, major, and credentials related to classroom quality and children's academic gains in pre-kindergarten? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21*(2), 174–195. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2006.04.004

Early, D., Iruka, I., Ritchie, S., Barbarin, O., Winn, D., Crawford, G., Frome, P., …& Pianta, R. (2010). How do pre-kindergarteners spend their time? Gender, ethnicity, and income as predictors of experiences in pre-kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 25*(2), 177-193.

Early, D., Maxwell, K., Burchinal, M., Alva, S., Bender, R., Bryant, D. et al. (2007). Teachers' education, classroom quality, and young children's academic skills: Results from seven studies of preschool programs. *Child Development, 78*(2), 558–580.

Early Childhood Australia (ECA). (2011). *Early childhood education and care in Australia: A discussion paper-prepared for the European Union-Australia Policy Dialogue, 11–15 April 2011.*

Ebbeck, M., & Waniganayake, M. (2010). Perspectives on play in a changing world. In M. Ebbeck & M. Waniganayake (Eds.), *Play in early childhood education: Facilitating learning in diverse contexts* (pp. 5-24). South Melbourne, AUS: Oxford University Press.

Eckert, T., McIntyre, L., DiGennaro, F., Arbolino, L., Perry, L., & Begeny, J. (2008). Researching the transition to kindergarten for typically developing children: A literature review of current processes, practices, and programs. In D. H. Molina (Ed.), *School psychology: 21st century issues and challenges* (pp. 235–252). Hauppauge, USA: Nova Sciences.

Educational Transitions & Change (ETC) Research Group. (2011). *Transition to school: Position statement.* Albury-Wodonga: Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education, Charles Sturt University.

Edwards, S. (2007). From developmental-constructivism to socio-cultural theory and practice: An expansive analysis of teachers' professional learning in early childhood education. *Journal of Early Childhood Education, 5*(1), 83-106.

Edwards, S., & Cutter-McKenzie, A. (2011). Environmentalising early childhood education curriculum through pedagogies of play. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 36*(1), 51-59.

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (1993). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.* Norwood, USA: Ablex.

Einarsdottir, J. (2003). When the bell rings we have to go inside: Preschool children's views on the elementary school. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, Themed Monograph,* (1), 35-49.

Einarsdottir, J. (2006). From pre-school to primary school: When different contexts meet. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 50*(2), 165-184.

Einarsdottir, J. (2007). Children's voices on the transition from preschool to primary school. In A.-W. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.), *Informing transitions in the early years: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 74-90). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Einarsdottir, J. (2013). Preschool to primary school in Iceland. In K. Margetts & A. Keinig (Eds.), *International perspectives on transition to school: Reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice* (pp. 69-78). New York, USA: Routledge.

Einarsdottir, J., Perry, B., & Dockett, S. (2008). Transition to school practices: Comparisons from Iceland and Australia. *Early Years: Journal of International Research and Development, 28*(1), 47–60. doi: 10.1080/09575140801924689

Elliot, A. (2006). *Early childhood education: Pathways to quality and equity for all children.* Camberwell, AUS: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Entwisle, D., & Alexander, K. (1998). Facilitating the transition to first grade: The nature of transition and research on factors affecting it. *The Elementary School Journal, 98*(4), 351-364.

Epstein, A. (2014). *The intentional teacher: Choosing the best strategies for young children's learning.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Fabian, H. (2002a). *Children starting school.* London, UK: David Fulton.

Fabian, H. (2002b). Empowering children for transitions. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *Transitions in the early years: Debating progression and continuity for children in early education* (pp. 123–134). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Fabian, H. (2007). Informing transitions. In A.-W. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.), *Informing transitions in the early years: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 3-20). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Fabian, H. (2012). *Children starting school: A guide to successful transitions and transfers for teachers and assistants.* Milton Park, UK: Routledge.

Fabian, H. (2013). Towards successful transitions. In K. Margetts & A. Keinig (Eds.), *International perspectives on transition to school: Reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice* (pp. 45-55). New York, USA: Routledge.

Fabian, H., & Dunlop, A.-W. (2002). Introduction. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *Transitions in the early years: Debating progression and continuity for children in early education* (pp. 1–7). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Fabian, H., & Dunlop, A.-W. (2007). *Outcomes of good practice in transitions processes for children entering primary school.* Working paper 42 in Early Childhood Development. Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Fang, Z. (1996). A review of research on teachers' beliefs and practices. *Educational Research, 38*(1), 47-65. doi: 10.1080/0013188960380104

Fantuzzo, J., Rouse, H., McDermott, P., Sekino, Y., Childs, S., & Weiss, A. (2005). Early childhood experiences and kindergarten success: A population-based study of a large urban setting. *School Psychology Review, 34*(4), 571-588.

Farrar, E., Goldfeld, S., & Moore, T. (2007). *School readiness. ARACY Topical Paper*. West Perth, AUS: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.

Fisher, J. (2009). 'We used to play in Foundation, it was more funner': Investigating feelings about transition from Foundation Stage to Year 1. *Early Years, 29*(2), 131-145.

Fisher, J. (2011). Building on the early years foundation stage: Developing good practice for transition into Key Stage 1. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 31*(1), 31-42. doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2010.512557

Fisher, K., Hirsch-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. (2008). Conceptual split? Parents' and experts' perceptions of play in the 21st century. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 29,* 305-316. doi:10.1016/jappdev.2008.04.006

Fleer, M. (2009). A cultural-historical perspective on play: Play as a leading activity across cultural communities. In I. Pramling-Samuelson & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Play and learning in early childhood settings* (pp. 1–17). Netherlands: Springer.

Fleer, M. (Ed.). (1996). *DAPcentrism: Challenging developmentally appropriate practices.* Canberra, AUS: Australian Early Childhood Association.

Fleer, M. (2010). *Concepts in play: A cultural historical view of early learning and development.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Fleer, M. (2011a). 'Conceptual play': Foregrounding imagination and cognition during concept formation in early years education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 12*(3), 224-239.

Fleer, M. (2011b). Kindergartens in cognitive times: Imagination as a dialectical relation between play and learning. *International Journal of Early Childhood, 43*(3), 245-259. doi: 10.1007/s13158-011-0044-8

Fleer, M., Tonyan, H., Mantilla, A., & Rivaland, C. (2009). Play and learning in Australia. In I. Pramling-Samuelsson & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Play and learning in early childhood settings: International Perspectives* (pp. 51-80). London, UK: Springer.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*(2), 219-245. doi: 10.1177/1077800405284.363

Flyvbjerg, B. (2011). Case study. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 301-316). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fromberg, D. (1992). A review of research on play. In C. Seefeldt (Ed.), *The early childhood curriculum: A review of current research* (pp. 42-84). New York, USA: Teachers College Press.

Frost, J., Wortham, S., & Reifel, S. (2012). *Play and child development* (4th ed.). New Jersey, USA: Pearson.

Fung, C., & Cheng, D. (2012). Consensus or dissensus? Stakeholders' views on the role of play in learning. *Early Years: An International Research Journal, 32(1)*, 17-33.

Gay, L., Mills, G., & Airasian, P. (2012). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications.* New Jersey, USA: Pearson Higher Ed.

Geiser, K., Horwitz, I., & Gerstein, A. (2013). *Improving the quality and continuity of practice across early childhood education and elementary community school settings. Research brief: Early Childhood Community School Linkages Project.* Retrieved from http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/resources/publications/GardnerCenter_RB_ECELinkages_2013.pdf

Giallo, R., Treyvaud, K., Matthews, J., & Keinhuis, M. (2010). Making the transition to primary school: An evaluation of a transition program for parents. *Australian Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 10, 1-17.

Gibbons, A. (2007). The politics of processes and products in education: An early childhood metanarrative crisis? *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 39*(3), 300-311.

Gill, S., Winters, D., & Friedman, D. (2006). Educators' views of pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten readiness and transition practices. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 7*(3), 213-227.

Ginsburg, K. (2007). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. Clinical report of the American Academy of Pediatrics. *Pediatrics, 119*(1), 182-191. doi: 10.1542/peds.2006-2697

Gmitrova, V., Podhajecká, M., & Gmitrov, J. (2009). Children's play preferences: Implications for preschool education. *Early Childhood Development and Care, 179*(3), 339-351. doi.org/10.1080/03004430601101883

Goldstein, L. (2007). Beyond the DAP versus standards dilemma: Examining the unforgiving complexity of kindergarten teaching in the United States. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 2*(1), 39-54.

Goodine, B. (2010). The folding and unfolding of play: What is play-based learning? In R. Doiron & M. Gabriel (Eds.), *Research in early child development in Prince Edward Island: A research Monograph* (pp. 66–89). Charlottetown, CAN: Centre for Education Research, University of Prince Edward Island.

Goouch, K. (2008). Understanding playful pedagogies, play narratives and play spaces. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 28*(1), 93-102. doi: 10.1080/09575140701815136

Gordon, G. (2009). What is play? In search of a definition. In D. Kuschner (Ed.), *From children to red hatters: Diverse images and issues of play* (pp. 1-13). Lanham, USA: University Press of America.

Graue, E. (2008). Teaching and learning in a post-DAP world. *Early Education and Development, 19*(3), 441–447.

Graue, E. (2009). Reimaging kindergarten: Restoring a developmental approach when accountability demands are pushing formal instruction on the youngest learners. *School Administrator, 66*(10), 10-15.

Graue, E. (2011). Are we paving paradise? *Educational Leadership, 68*(7), 12-17.

Graue, W. (2006). The answer is readiness – Now what is the question? *Early Education and Development, 17(1)*, 43–56.

Greibel, W., & Niesel, R. (2000, August/September). *The children's voice in the complex transition into kindergarten and school.* Paper presented at 10th European conference on quality in early childhood education: Complexity, diversity and multiple perspectives in early childhood services, London.

Greibel, W., & Niesel, R. (2002). Co-constructing transition into kindergarten and school by children, parents and teachers. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *Transitions in the early years: Debating progression and continuity for children in early education* (pp. 64-75). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Grieshaber, S. (2008). Interrupting stereotypes: Teaching and the education of young children. *Early Education and Development, 19(*3), 505-518.

Grieshaber, S. (2009). Equity and quality in the early years of schooling. *Curriculum Perspectives, 29*(1), 91-97.

Grieshaber, S. (2010). Departures from tradition: the early years learning framework for Australia. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, *4(*2), 33-44.

Grieshaber, S., & McArdle, F. (2010). *The trouble with play.* Maidenhead, UK: The Open University Press.

Grieshaber, S., & Shearer, A. (2013). Continuity? The early years learning framework and the Australian Curriculum. *Every Child, 19*(4), 16-17.

Gronlund, G. (2010). *Developmentally appropriate play: Guiding young children to a higher level.* St. Paul, USA: Redleaf Press.

Gronlund, G., & Stewart, K. (2011). Intentionality in action: A strategy that benefits preschoolers and teachers. *Young Children, 66*(6), 28-33.

Gunnarsdottir, B. (2014). From play to school: Are core values of ECEC in Iceland being undermined by 'schoolification'? *International Journal of Early Years Education, 22*(3), 242-250.

Hair, E., Halle, T., Terry-Humen, E., Lavelle, B., & Calkins, J. (2006). Children's school readiness in the ECLS-K: Predictions to academic, health and social outcomes in first grade. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21*(4), 431-454. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2006.09.005

Handal, B., & Herrington, A. (2003). Mathematics teachers' beliefs and curriculum reform. *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, *15(1*), 59-69.

Harris, J., Golinkoff, R., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2011). Lessons from the crib for the classroom: How children really learn vocabulary. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol. 3, pp. 49-65). New York, USA: Guilford Press.

Harrison, C. (2015). *A positive transition to school: Working together to bridge the divide project report*. Unpublished manuscript: Australian Catholic University, Sydney, NSW.

Harrison, L., Goldfeld, S., Metcalfe E., & Moore, T. (2012). *Early learning programs that promote children's developmental and educational outcomes. Resource Sheet No. 15*. Produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Hatch, J. (2002). Accountability shovedown: Resisting the standards movement in early childhood education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *83*(6), 457-463.

Hattie, J. (2003, October). *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?* Keynote address at the ACER Research Conference, Melbourne. Retrieved from http://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference_2003/4/

Hedges, H. (2010). Whose goals and interests? In L. Brooker & S. Edwards (Eds.), *Engaging play* (pp. 25-38). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Hegde, D., & Cassidy, D. (2009). Kindergarten teachers' perspectives on Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP): A study conducted in Mumbai (India). *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 23*(3), 367-381. doi: 10.1080/02568540909594667

Henderson, L. (2012). The early childhood-school relationship: Overcoming invisible barriers. *Early Childhood Folio, 16*(2), 20-25.

Henderson, L. (2014). When early childhood and school meet: Exploring potential within early childhood–school relationships. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 39*(3), 29-36.

Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. (2008). Why play=learning? *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development,* 1-7.

Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R., Berk, L., & Singer, D. (2009). *Mandate for playful learning in preschool.* New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

Hirst, M., Jervis, N., Visagie, K., Sojo, V., & Cavanagh, S. (2011). *Transition to primary school: A review of the literature.* Canberra, AUS: Commonwealth of Australia.

Holliday, M. (2013). 'Formal' learning: Yes or no? *Every Child, 19*(3), 8-9.

Hopps, K. (2004). Teacher communication across the preschool-school boundary. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 29*(1), 8-13.

Hopps, K. (2014). ECCE setting + school + communication = What for educator relationships? *Early Years: An international Research Journal, 34*(4), 405-419.

Hopps, K., & Dockett, S. (2011). *Preschool educators' communication with schools: What the Communication Experience Technique can reveal about the nature of communication, motivations and relationships.* Paper presented at the AARE 2011 conference proceedings, Hobart.

Hosking, D., & Pluut, B. (2010). (Re)constructing reflexivity: A relational constructionist approach. *The Qualitative Report*, *15*(1), 59-75.

Howard, J. (2010). Making the most of play in the early years: The importance of children's perceptions. In P. Broadhead, J. Howard, & E. Wood (Eds.), *Play and learning in the early years* (pp. 145-160). London, UK: Sage.

Howard, J., & McInnes, K. (2010). Thinking through the challenge of a play-based curriculum. Increasing playfulness via co-construction. In J. Moyles (Ed.), *Thinking about play: Developing a reflective approach* (pp. 30-44). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Hujala, E., Helenius, A., & Hyvonen, P. (2010). Play for learning and transition to school. In M. Ebbeck & M. Waniganayake (Eds.), *Play in early childhood education: Learning in diverse contexts* (pp. 89-102). South Melbourne, AUS: Oxford University Press.

Hunkin, E. (2014). We're offering true play-based learning: Teacher perspectives on educational dis/continuity in the early years. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 39*(2), 30-35.

Huser, C., Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2015). Transition to school: Revisiting the bridge metaphor. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 24*(3), 439-449. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2015.1102414

Hyvonen, P. (2011). Play in the school context? The perspectives of Finnish teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 36*(8), 65-83.

Ishimine, K. (2011). Quality in early childhood education and care: A case study of disadvantage. *Australian Educational Researcher, 38*(3), 257-274. doi: 10.1007/s13384-011-0028-6

Jay, J., Knaus, M., & Hesterman, S. (2014). High-quality early childhood education in the early years of school. *Every Child, 20*(3), 22-23.

Johannson, I. (2007). Horizontal transitions: What can it mean for children in the early school years? In A.-W. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.), *Informing transition in the early years: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 33-44). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Jolly, Y., & Orbach, S. (2008). *Smoothing the transition to kindergarten: Toward a coordinated statewide policy.* Cambridge, USA: Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Jones, E., & Reynolds, G. (1992). *The play's the thing: Teachers' roles in children's play.* New York, USA: Teachers College.

Johnson, J., & Dinger, D. (2012). *Let them play: An early learning (un)curriculum*. St Paul, USA: Redleaf Press.

Kagan, D. (1992). Implications of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychologist, 27*(1), 65-90.

Kagan, S. (1990). Children's play: The journey from theory to practice. In E. Klugman, & S. Smilansky (Eds.), *Children's play and learning: Perspectives and policy implications* (pp. 173–187). New York, USA: Teachers College Press.

Kagan, S., & Neuman, M. (1998). Lessons from three decades of transition research. *The Elementary School Journal, 98*(4), 365-379.

Kagan, S., & Kauerz, K. (2007). Reaching for the whole: Integration and alignment in early education policy. In R. Pianta, M. Cox, & K. Snow (Eds.), *School readiness and the transition to Kindergarten in the era of accountability* (pp. 11-30). Baltimore, USA: Paul H. Brookes.

Kagan, S. (2010). Seeing transition through a new prism: Pedagogical, programmatic and policy alignment. In S. Kagan & K. Tarrant (Eds.), *Transitions for young children: Creating connections across early childhood systems* (pp. 3‑17). Baltimore, USA: Brookes.

Karila, K., & Rantavuori, L. (2014). Discourses at the boundary spaces: Developing a fluent transition from preschool to school. *Early Years: An International Research Journal, 34*(4), 377-391. doi: 10.1080/09575146.2014.967663

Kauerz, K. (2006). Ladders of learning: Fighting fade-out by advancing PK-3 alignment. *NAF Issue Brief No. 2.* Washington, DC: New America Foundation, Early Education Initiative.

Kelman, K., & Lauchlan, L. (2010). Thinking through transition, pedagogy and play from early childhood education to primary. In J. Moyles (Ed.), *Thinking about play: Developing a reflective approach* (pp. 30-44). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Kennedy, A., & Barblett, L. (2010). Learning and teaching through play: Supporting the early years learning framework. *Research in Practice Series, 17(3).* Canberra, AUS: Early Childhood Australia.

Kilderry, A. (2012). *Teacher decision making in early childhood education* (Unpublished PhD thesis). Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

Kilderry, A. (2015). Intentional pedagogies: Insights from the past. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 40*(3), 20-28.

Konig, J. (2012). Teachers' pedagogical beliefs: Current and future research. In J. Konig (Ed.), *Teachers' pedagogical beliefs: Definition and operalisation – connections to content and performance development and change* (pp. 7-14). Munster, Germany: Waxmann.

Kraft-Sayre, M., & Pianta, R. (2000). *Enhancing the transition to kindergarten: Linking children, families, and schools.* Charlottesville, USA: University of Virginia, National Center for Early Development and Learning.

Lam, M., & Pollard, A. (2006). A conceptual framework for understanding children as agents in the transition from home to kindergarten. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 26*(2), 123-141. doi: 10.1080/0957514060075990

LaParo, K., Kraft-Sayre, M., & Pianta, R. (2003). Preschool to kindergarten transition activities: Involvement and satisfaction of families and teachers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 17*(2), 147-158. doi: 10.1080/02568540309595006

Lara-Cinisomo, S., Fuligni, S., Daughterty, L., Howes, C., & Karoly, L. (2009). A qualitative study of early childhood educators' beliefs about key preschool classroom experiences. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 11*(1).* Retrieved from http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v11n1/lara.html

Laverick, D. (2008). Starting school: Welcoming young children and families into early school experiences. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 35*(4), 321-326.

Le, V., Kirby, S., Barney, H., Setodji, C., & Gershwin, D. (2006). *School readiness, full-day Kindergarten, and student achievement: An empirical investigation*. Santa Monica, USA: RAND Corporation.

Leggett, N., & Ford, M. (2013). A fine balance: Understanding the roles educators and children play as intentional teachers and intentional learners within the 'Early Years Learning Framework'. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 38*(4), 42-50.

Li, J. (2009). Beliefs about learning. In E. Anderman & L. Anderman (Eds.), *Teacher belief: Psychology of classroom learning – An encyclopedia, Vol 2.* (pp. 909-915). E-Book: Gale Cengage Learning.

Li, W., Mak, Y., Chan, S., Chu, A., Lee, E., & Lam, T. (2012). Effectiveness of a play-integrated primary one preparatory programme to enhance a smooth transition for children. *Journal of Health Psychology, 18*(1), 10-25.

Li, H., Rao, N., & Tse, S. (2011). Bridging the gap: A longitudinal study of the relationship between pedagogical continuity and early Chinese literacy acquisition. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 31*(1), 57–70. doi: 10.1080/09575146.2010.515944

Lickess, T. (2008). Blurring the line between early childhood and school. *Every Child, 14*(3), 26.

Lim, M-YS. (2010). Reconsidering the play-work dichotomy in pedagogy. In M. Ebbeck & M. Waniganayake (Eds.), *Play in early childhood education* (pp. 141-156). Melbourne, AUS: Oxford University Press.

Lincoln, Y., Lynham, S., & Guba, E. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In M. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 97-128). Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage.

Lobman, C. (2005). "Yes and": The uses of improvisation for early childhood professional development. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 26*(3), 305-319.

LoCasale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A., Downer, J., & Pianta, R. (2008). Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*(1), 124-139. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2007.06.001

Logan, H., & Sumsion, J. (2010). Early childhood teachers' understandings of and provision for quality. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 35*(3), 42-50.

Logue, M., & Harvey, H. (2009). Preschool teachers' views of active play. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 24*(1), 32-49. doi: 10.1080/02568540903439375

Loh, J. (2013). Inquiry into issues of trustworthiness and quality in narrative studies: A perspective. *The Qualitative Report*, *18*(33), 1-15.

Lord, A., & McFarland, L. (2010). Pre-service primary teachers' perceptions of early childhood philosophy and pedagogy: A case study examination. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *35*(3), 1-13.

Luke, A. (2010). Will the Australian national curriculum up the intellectual ante in classrooms? *Curriculum Perspectives, 33*(1), 23–29.

Lynch, M. (2015). More play, please: The perspective of Kindergarten teachers on play in the classroom. *American Journal of Play, 7*(3), 347-370.

MacNaughton, G., Rolfe, S., & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice.* Crows Nest, AUS: Allen & Unwin.

Margetts, K. (1997). Factors impacting on children's adjustment to the first year of primary school. *Early Childhood Folio, 3*, 53-56.

Margetts, K. (1999). *Transition to school: Looking forward.* Selected papers from the AECA National Conference, Darwin.

Margetts, K. (2002). Transition to school – Complexity and diversity. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 10*(2), 103-114. doi: 10.1080/13502930285208981

Margetts, K. (2005). Children's adjustment to the first year of schooling: Indicators of hyperactivity, internalising and externalising behaviours. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood, 1*, 36-44.

Margetts, K. (2007). Preparing children for school: Benefits and privileges. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 32*(2), 43–50.

Margetts, K. (2009). Early transition and adjustment and children's adjustment after six years of schooling. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 17*(3), 309–324.

Martlew, J., Stephen, C., & Ellis, J. (2011). Play in the primary school classroom? The experience of teachers supporting children's learning through a new pedagogy. *Early Years*, *31*(1), 71–83.

Marxen, C., Ofstedal, K., & Danbom, K. (2008). Highly qualified kindergarten teachers: Have they been left behind? *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 29*(1), 81-88. doi.org/10.1080/10901020701878693

Maxwell, J. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage.

Mayfield, M. (2003). Teaching strategies: Continuity among early childhood programs. *Childhood Education, 79*(4), 239-241. doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2003.10521201

McArdle, F., & McWilliam, E. (2005). From balance to blasphemy: Shifting metaphors for researching early childhood education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 18*(3), 323–336. doi: 10.1080/09518390500082376

McCulloch, G. (2004). *Documentary research in education, history, and the social sciences.* London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

McGann, J., & Clark, P. (2007). Fostering positive transitions for school success. *Young Children*, *62*(6), 77-79.

McGettigan, I., & Gray, C. (2012). Perspectives on school readiness in rural Ireland: The experiences of parents and children. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 20*(1), 15-29.

McGregor, B. (2010). Where is the PLAY in worksheets, colouring-in, art templates, phonics programs, sight words and early readers? *Educating Young Children: Learning and Teaching in the Early Childhood Years, 16(1)*, 6-10.

McInnes, K., Howard, J., Miles, G., & Crowley, K. (2011). Differences in practitioners' understanding of play and how this influences pedagogy and children's perceptions of play. *Early Years: An International Research Journal, 3(2)*, 121-133.

McIntyre, L., Blacher, J., & Baker, B. (2006). The transition to school: Adaptation in young children with and without intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 50*(5), 349-361.

McMullen, M., & Alat, K. (2002). Education matters in the nurturing of the beliefs of pre-school caregivers and teachers. *Early Childhood Research and Practice* [online], *4*(2). Retrieved from http://ecrp.illinois.edu/v4n2/mcmullen.html

Merriam. S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and interpretation.* San Francisco, USA: John Wiley & Sons.

Merriam, S., & Tisdell, E. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and interpretation.* San Francisco, USA: John Wiley & Sons.

Mertens, D. (2015). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage.

Miller, K. (2015). The transition to Kindergarten: How families from lower-income backgrounds experienced the first year. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *43*(3), 213-221.

Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009). *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why children need to play in school.* Alliance for Childhood (NJ3a).

Mirkhil, M. (2010). 'I want to play when I go to school': Children's views on the transition to school from kindergarten. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 35*(3), 134-139.

Monkeviciene, O., Mishara, B., & Dufour, S. (2006). Effects of the Zippy's friends programme on children's coping abilities during the transition from kindergarten to elementary school. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *34*(1), 53-60.

Mortlock, A., Plowman, N., & Glasgow, A. (2011). Transition to school: A principles approach. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*, *8*(2), 94-103.

Moss, P. (2008). What future for the relationship between early childhood education and care and compulsory schooling? *Research in Comparative and International Education, 3(3)*, 224-234.

Moss, P. (2013). The relationship between early childhood and compulsory education: A properly political question. In P. Moss (Ed.), *Early childhood and compulsory education: Reconceptualising the relationship* (pp. 2-50). London, UK: Routledge.

References

Moyles, J. (2010a). Foreword. In P. Broadhead, J. Howard, & E. Wood (Eds.), *Play and learning in the early years* (pp. xi-xiii). London, UK: Sage.

Moyles, J. (2010b). Practitioner reflection on play and playful pedagogies. In J. Moyles (Ed.), *Thinking about play: Developing a reflective approach* (pp. 13-29). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Moyles, J. (Ed.). (2015). *The excellence of play*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Moyles, J., Adams, S., & Musgrove, A. (2002). SPEEL: Study of pedagogical effectiveness in early learning project. *Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Research Report No: 363*. London, UK.

Munby, H. (1982). The place of teachers' beliefs in research on teacher thinking and decision making, and an alternative methodology. *Instructional Science, 11*, 201-225.

Munby, H. (1984). A qualitative approach to the study of a teacher's beliefs. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 21*(1), 27-38.

Myck-Wayne, J. (2010). In defense of play: Beginning the dialog about the power of play. *Young Exceptional Children, 13*(4), 14-23. doi: 10.1177/1096250610376616

National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2009). *Position statement: Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8.* Washington, DC: Author.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). *Young children develop in an environment of relationships: Working Paper No. 1.*

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2007). *The science of early childhood development: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do.* Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

Nelson, R. (2004). The transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 32*(3), 187-190.

Nespor, J. (1987). The role of beliefs in the practice of teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 19*(4), 317-328. doi: 10.1080/0022027870190403

Neuman, M. (2002). The wider context: An international overview of transition issues. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *Transitions in the early years: Debating continuity and progression for young children in early education* (pp. 8-22). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Neuman, M. (2005). Global early care and education: Challenges, responses and lessons. *Phi Delta Kappan, 87*(3), 188-192.

Neuman, M. (2007). Pedagogical continuity. In M. Woodhead & P. Moss (Eds.), *Early childhood and primary education: Transitions in the lives of young children*. *Early Childhood in Focus 2* (p. 50). Milton Keynes, UK: Open University.

Neuman, W. (2000). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed.). Boston, USA: Allyn & Bacon.

Neuman, W. (2011). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* Boston, USA: Pearson Education.

New South Wales Government. (1990). *NSW legislation. Education Act 1990 No 8, 21B Compulsory school-age.* Retrieved from http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au

New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC). (2012a). *Types of children's services.* Retrieved from http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/types_of_child_care.html

New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC). (2012b). *Going to a public school*. Retrieved from http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/preschool/index.php

New South Wales Government, Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC). (2014). *NSW Transition to school statement*. Retrieved from http://www.transitiontoschool.nsw.edu.au/wpcontent/uploads/2016/06/Transition_to_School_Statement_.pdf

New South Wales Government, Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC). (2014). *NSW Transition to school statement – Information sheet for early childhood educators.* Retrieved from https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/what-we-offer/regulation-and-accreditation/early-childhood-education-care/funding/funding-projects/tts/TTS-Information-Sheet-for-Early-Childhood-Educators.pdf

New South Wales Government, Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC). (2014). *The NSW Transition to School Statement – Information sheet for school teachers*. Retrieved from https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/what-we-offer/regulation-and-accreditation/early-childhood-education-care/funding/funding-projects/tts/TTS-Information-Sheet-for-School-Teachers.pdf

New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET). (2009). *Best Start overview information.* Retrieved from http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/beststart/index.htm

New Zealand Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whãriki. He Whãriki Mãtauranga mõ ngã Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.

Nicolopoulou, A. (2010). The alarming disappearance of play from early childhood education*. Human Development, 53*(1), 1-4. doi: 10.1159/000268135

Niesel, R., & Griebel, W. (2001, August/September). *Transition to school child: What children tell us about school and what they teach us.* Paper presented at the 11th European Conference on quality on early childhood education, Alkmaar, The Netherlands.

Niesel, R., & Griebel, W. (2007). Enhancing the competence of transition systems through co-construction. In A.-W. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.), *Informing transition in the early years: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 21-32). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Nimmo, J., & Park, S. (2009). Engaging early childhood teachers in the thinking and practice of inquiry: Collaborative research mentorship as a tool for shifting teacher identity. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 30*(2), 93-104.

Noel, A. (2010). Perceptions of school readiness in one Queensland primary school. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 35(2)*, 28-35.

Noel, A. (2011). Easing the transition to school: Administrators' descriptions of transition to school activities. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 36*(4), 44-52.

O'Connell, J. (2012). So you think they can learn*? Scan: The Journal For Educators, 31*(2), 5-11.

O'Gorman, L. (2008). The preparatory year in a Queensland non-government school: Exploring parents' views. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 33*(3), 51-58.

O'Gorman, L., & Ailwood, J. (2012). 'They get fed up with playing.' Parents' views on play-based learning in the Preparatory Year*. Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 13*(4), 266-275.

O'Kane, M. (2007). *Building bridges: The transition from preschool to primary school for children in Ireland* (Doctoral Dissertation). Dublin Institute of Technology.

O'Kane, M. (2015). Multiple transitions. A paper prepared for the symposium *Early educational alignment: Reflecting on context, curriculum and pedagogy.* The University of Dublin.

O'Kane, M. (2016). *Transition from preschool to primary school – Research report 19.* Dublin, Ireland: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

O'Kane, M., & Hayes, N. (2006). The transition to school in Ireland: Views of preschool and primary school teachers. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood, 2,* 4-16.

O'Kane, M., & Hayes, N. (2010). *Supporting early childhood educational provision within a cluster of Deis preschool and primary school settings with a specific focus on transition between the two educational settings.* Centre for Social & Educational Research Dublin Institute of Technology.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2001). *Starting strong I: Early childhood education and care.* Paris, France: OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2004). *Education at a glance: OECD indicators 2004*. Paris, France: OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2006). *Starting strong II: Early childhood education and care*. Paris, France: OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2008). *Education at a glance 2008*. Paris, France: OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2011). *Education at a glance 2011: OECD Indicators*. Paris, France: OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2012). *Starting strong III: A quality toolbox for early childhood education and care*. Paris, France: OECD Publications.

Pajares, M. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research, 62*(3), 307-332.

Pappano, L. (2010, September/October). Kids haven't changed: Kindergarten has. *Harvard Education Letter, 26*(5). Retrieved from http://www.hepg.org/hel/printarticle/479

Parker, A., & Neuharth-Pritchett, S. (2006). Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Kindergarten: Factors shaping teacher beliefs and practice. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 21*(1), 65–78.

Patton, M. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluative methods: Integrating theory and practice.* Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage.

Pellegrini, A. (1991). A longitudinal study of popular and rejected children's rough and tumble play. *Early Education and Development, 3*, 205-214.

Perry, B., & Dockett, S. (2011). 'How 'bout we have a celebration!' Advice from children on starting school. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 19*(3), 373-386. doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2011.597969

Perry, B., Dockett, S., & Harley, E. (2012). The *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia and the Australian Curriculum – Mathematics*: *Linking educators' practice through pedagogical inquiry questions.* In B. Atweh, M. Goos, R. Jorgensen, & D. Siemon (Eds.), *Engaging the Australian Curriculum Mathematics: Perspectives from the field* (pp. 153-174). Adelaide, South Australia: Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia.

Peters, S. (2000, August/September). *Multiple perspectives on continuity in early learning and the transition to school.* Paper presented at 10th European Early Childhood Education Research Association Conference, University of London.

Peters, S. (2002). Teachers' perspectives of transitions. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *Transitions in the early years: Debating continuity and progression for young children in early education* (pp. 87-97). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

241

Peters, S. (2010). *Literature review: Transition for early childhood education to school – Report to the Ministry of Education*. New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Peters, S. (2014). Chasms, bridges and borderlands: A transitions research 'across the border' from early childhood education to school in New Zealand. In B. Perry, S. Dockett, & A. Petriwskyj (Eds.), *Transitions to School: International Research, Policy and Practice* (pp. 105–116). Dortrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Peters, S., Hartley, C., Rogers, P., Smith, J., & Carr, M. (2009). Early childhood portfolios as a tool for enhancing learning during the transition to school. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood, 3*, 4-15.

Petrakos, H., & Lehrer, J. (2011). Parents' and teachers' perceptions of transition practices in kindergarten. *Exceptionality Education International, 21*(2), 62-73.

Petriwskyj, A. (2005). Transition to school: Early years teachers' roles. *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education, 12*(2), 39-49.

Petriwskyj, A. (2010). Kindergarten transition and linkages to primary school-readiness reconceptualised. In P. Petersen, E. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education, 2*, (pp. 120–125). Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Petriwskyj, A. (2013). Pedagogies of inclusive transition to school. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 38*(3), 45-55.

Petriwskyj, A., & Grieshaber, S. (2011). Critical perspectives on the transition to school: Reframing the debate. In A. Laverick & M. Jalongo (Eds.), *Transitions to early care and education: International perspectives on making schools ready for young children* (pp. 75-86). Dortrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Petriwskyj, A., O'Gorman, L., & Turunen, T. (2013). The interface of the national Australian Curriculum and the pre-Year 1 class in school: Exploring tensions. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 38*(1), 16-22.

Petriwskyj, A., Thorpe, K., & Tayler, C. (2005). Trends in construction of transition to school in three western regions, 1990–2004. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 13*(1), 55-69.

Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood.* New York, USA: Norton.

Pianta, R. (2004). Going to Kindergarten: Transition models and practices. In D. Whitton, B. Perry, & S. Dockett (Eds.), *Proceedings of the international conference, continuity and change: Transitions in education* (CD Rom), University of Western Sydney, Sydney.

Pianta, R. (2007). Early education in transition. In R. Pianta, M. Cox, & K. Snow (Eds.), *School readiness & the transition to Kindergarten in the era of accountability* (pp. 3-11). Baltimore, USA: Paul H. Brookes.

Pianta, R., & Kraft-Sayre, M. (2003). *Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families, and schools.* Baltimore, USA: Paul H. Brookes.

Potter, G., & Briggs, F. (2003). Children talk about the early experiences at school. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 28*(3), 44-49.

Pramling-Samuelsson, I., & Asplund Carlsson, M. (2008). The playing learning child: Towards a pedagogy of early childhood. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *52*(6), 623-641.

Pramling-Samuelsson, I., & Fleer, M. (2009). *Play and learning in early childhood setting: International perspectives.* New York, USA: Springer.

Pramling-Samuelsson, I., & Johansson, E. (2006). Play and learning—inseparable dimensions in preschool practice. *Early Child Development and Care, 176(*1), 47-65.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). (2011). *A practical vision for early childhood education and care.* Retrieved from www.pwc.com.au

Pyle, A., & Bigelow, A. (2015). Play in Kindergarten: An interview and observational study in three Canadian classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 43*(5), 385-393.

Quance, A., Lehrer, J., & Stathopoulos, H. (2008). Play in the grade one classroom: An exploration of teacher beliefs, classroom organization, and obstacles to implementation in Quebec. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education, 1*(1), 1-18.

Ramey, C., & Ramey, S. (2004). Early learning and school readiness: Can early intervention make a difference? *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, *50*(4), 471-491.

Ramey, S., & Ramey, C. (1998). The transition to school: Opportunities and challenges for children, families, educators, and communities. *The Elementary School Journal, 98*(4), 293-295.

Ramey, S., & Ramey, C. (1999). The transition to school for 'at-risk' children. In R. Pianta & M. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 217-251). Baltimore, USA: Paul H. Brookes.

Rantavuori, L., & Karila, K. (2015, September). *Joint learning activities as a mean to ensure smooth transition from ECCE setting to primary school.* Paper presented at the 25th EECERA annual conference 'Innovation, Experimentation and Adventure in Early Childhood' Barcelona, Catalunya.

Ranz-Smith, D. (2007). Teacher perception of play: In leaving no child behind are teachers leaving childhood behind? *Early Education and Development*, 18(2), 271-303.

Rapley, T. (2007). *Doing conversation, discourse and document analysis.* London, UK: Sage.

Rimm-Kaufman, S., Pianta, R., & Cox, M. (2000). Teachers' judgments of problems in the transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15*(2), 147–166.

Rogers, S. (2011). Play and pedagogy: A conflict of interests? In S. Rogers (Ed.), *Rethinking play and pedagogy in early childhood education: Concepts, contexts and cultures* (pp. 5-18). Milton Park, UK: Routledge.

Rosier, K., & McDonald, M. (2011). *Promoting positive education and care transitions for children. Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) Resource sheet.* Melbourne, AUS: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Roskos, K., & Christie, J. (2011). The play-literacy nexus and the importance of evidence-based techniques in the classroom. *American Journal of Play, 4(2),* 204-224.

Roskos, K., & Neuman, S. (2011). The classroom environment. *The Reading Teacher, 65*(2), 110-114.

Russell, J. (2011). From child's garden to academic press: The role of shifting institutional logics in redefining Kindergarten education. *American Educational Research Journal, 48*(2), 236–267. doi: 10.3102/0002831210372135

Russo, H. (2012). *Rethinking the role of play and creativity at the centre of curriculum and assessment. A New York city school's journey to re-imaging education for a changing world.* Paper presented at the ICCP World Conference, Estonia.

Ryan, S. (2005). Freedom to choose: Examining children's experiences in choice time. In N. Yelland (Ed.), *Critical Issues in Early Childhood Education* (pp. 99-114). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Ryan, S., & Goffin, S. (2008). Missing in action: Teaching in early care and education. *Early Education and Development, 19*(3), 385-395.

Sammons, P. (2010). Does pre-school make a difference? Identifying the impact of pre-school on children's cognitive and social behavioural development at different ages. In K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford, & B. Taggart (Eds.), *Early childhood matters: Evidence from the effective pre-school and primary education project* (pp. 92–113). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., & Elliot, K. (2002). *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Technical Paper 8a -Measuring the impact of pre-school on children's cognitive progress over the preschool period.* London, UK: Institute of Education, University of London.

Sanagavarapu, P., & Perry, B. (2005). Concerns and expectations of Bangladeshi parents as their children start school. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, *30*(3), 45–51.

Sandberg, A., & Heden, R. (2011). Play's importance in school. *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education, 39*(3), 317-329.

Sandberg, A., & Pramling-Samuelsson, I. (2003). Preschool teachers' play experiences then and now. *Early Childhood Research and Practice, 5* (1), 1-18. Retrieved from http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v5n1/sandberg.html

Sanders, D., White, G., Burge, B., Sharp, C., Eames, A., McEune, R., & Grayson, H. (2005). *A study of the transition from the Foundation Stage to key stage 1*. DfES Research Report No. SSU/2005/FR/013. London, UK: DfES.

Saracho, O. (2012). *An integrated play-based curriculum for young children.* New York, USA: Routledge.

Saracho, O., & Spodek, B. (1998). A historical overview of theories of play. In O. Saracho & B. Spodek (Eds.), *Multiple perspectives on play in early childhood education* (pp. 1-10). New York, USA: State University of New York Press.

Saracho, O., & Spodek, B. (2006). Young children's literacy-related play. *Early Child Development and Care, 176*(7), 707-721.

Sarantakos, S. (2013). *Social research.* New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sayers, M., West, S., Lorains, J., Laidlaw, B., Moore, T., & Robinson, R. (2012). Starting school: A pivotal life transition for children and their families. *Family Matters, 95*, 45-56.

Schulting, A., Malone, P., Dodge, K. (2005). The effect of school-based kindergarten transition policies and practices on child academic outcomes. *Developmental Psychology, 41*(6), 860–871. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.41.6.860

Schunk, D. (1991). Self-efficacy and academic motivation. *Educational Psychologist, 26*, 207-231.

Schweinhart, L., & Weikart, D. (1997). The High/Scope preschool curriculum comparison study through age 23. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 12(*2), 117–143.

Scott-Little, C., Kagan, S., & Frelow, V. (2003). *Standards for preschool children's learning and development: Who has standards, how were they developed, and how are they used?* Retrieved from http://www.serve.org

Scott-Little, C., Kagan, S., Frelow, V. (2006). Conceptualization of readiness and the content of early learning standards: The intersection of policy and research? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21*(2), 153-173.

Sherwood, S., & Reifel, S. (2010). The multiple meanings of play: Exploring preservice teachers' beliefs about a central element of early childhood education. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 31*(4), 322-343. doi:10.1080/10901027.2010.524065

Shields, P. (2009). 'School doesn't feel as much of a partnership': Parents' perceptions of their children's transition from nursery school to reception class. *Early Years,* 29(3), 237–248.

Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook.* London, UK: Sage.

Silvers, R., Measelle, J., Armstrong, J., & Essex, M. (2005). Trajectories of classroom externalizing behavior: Contributions of child characteristics, family characteristics, and the teacher-child relationship during the school transition. *Journal of School Psychology, 43,* 39-60.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (1999). Early childhood pedagogy: Practice, principles and research. In P. Mortimore (Ed.), *Understanding pedagogy and its impact on learning* (pp. 20–45). London, UK: Paul Chapman.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). A focus on pedagogy: Case studies of effective practice. In K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford, & B. Taggart (Eds.), *Early childhood matters: Evidence from the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education project* (pp. 149-165). London, UK: Routledge.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Sylva, K. (2004). Research pedagogy in English pre-schools. *British Educational Research Journal, 30*(5), 713 - 730.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R., & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years, Research Report No: 356.* London, UK: Department of Education and Skills.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Woodhead, M. (2009). *Effective early childhood programmes: Early childhood in Focus Four*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University with the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Skouteris, H., Watson, B., & Lum, J. (2012). Preschool children's transition to formal schooling: The importance of collaboration between teachers, parents and children. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *37(4)*, 78-85.

Smart, D., Sanson, A., Baxter, J., Edwards, B., & Hayes, A. (2008). *Home-to-school transition for financially disadvantaged children: Summary report.* Sydney, AUS: The Smith Family and Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Smilansky, S. (1990). Socio-dramatic play: Its relevance to behaviour and achievement in school. In E. Klugman & S. Smilansky (Eds.), *Children's play and learning perspectives and policy implication* (pp. 18-42). New York, USA: Teachers College Press.

Smith, P. (2010). *Children and play.* Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Smith, S. (2015). *Playing to engage: Fostering engagement for children and teachers in low socioeconomic regions through science and mathematics play-based learning* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Notre Dame Australia. Retrieved from http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/116

Smith, S., & Maher, M. (2016 in press). The power of play-based learning: A pedagogy of hope for potentially at-risk children. In S. Lynch, D. Pike, & C. a'Beckett (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspectives on play from early childhood and beyond*. Singapore: Springer Education.

Snow, L. (2006). Measuring school readiness: Conceptual and practical considerations. *Early Education and Development, 17*(1), 7-41.

Sorin, R., & Markotsis, J. (2008). *Building a solid foundation for school: A communities approach. ARACY Topical Paper*. West Perth, AUS: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. doi: 10.4225/50/557E1BCF1E36A

Spodek, B., & Saracho, O. (2003). Early childhood educational play. In O. Saracho & B. Spodek (Eds.), *Contemporary perspectives of play in early childhood education* (pp. 171-180). Greenwich, USA: Information Age Publishing.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage.

Stake, R. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work.* New York, USA: The Guildford Press.

Stephen, C. (2006). *Early years education: Perspectives from a review of the international literature.* Edinburgh, Scotland: Scottish Executive Education Department. Retrieved from www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/92395/0022116.pdf

Stephen, C. (2010). Pedagogy: The silent partner in early years learning. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 30*(1), 15-28. doi.org/10.1080/09575140903402881

Stipek, D. (2002). At what age should children enter kindergarten? A question for policy makers and parents. *Social Policy Report, 16*(2), 3-16.

Sumsion, J., Barnes, S., Cheeseman, S., Harrison, L., Stonehouse, A. (2009). Insider perspectives on developing belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 34*(4), 4-13.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). *The ambiguity of play.* Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2010). *Early childhood matters: Evidence from the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education Project*. London, UK: Routledge.

Synodi, E. (2010). Play in the Kindergarten: The case of Norway, Sweden, New Zealand and Japan. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 18*(3), 185-200.

Tayler, C. (2010). *Review of educational practice in Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Year 1 provision in Western Australia: Synthesis of Findings*. Melbourne, AUS: The University of Melbourne.

Tayler, C., Cleveland, G., Ishimine, K., Cloney, D., & Thorpe, K. (2013). The quality of early childhood education and care services in Australia. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 38*(2), 13-21.

Tayler, C., Cloney, D., & Niklas, F. (2014). *A bird in the hand: understanding the trajectories of development of young children and the need for action to improve outcomes.* Unpublished manuscript, Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

Thomas, L., Warren, E., & de Vries, E. (2010). Play-based learning and intentional teaching in early childhood contexts. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 36*(4), 69-75.

Thompson, G., & Harbaugh, A. (2012). *The effects of NAPLAN: Teacher perceptions of the impact of NAPLAN on pedagogy and curriculum.* Paper presented at the Joint AARE/APERA Conference, Sydney.

Timperley, H., McNaughton, S., Howie, L., & Robinson, V. (2003). Transitioning children from early childhood education to school: Teacher beliefs and transition practices. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, *28*(2), 32-39.

Tobin, J., & Kurban, F. (2010). Preschool practitioners' and immigrant parents' beliefs about academics and play in the early childhood education curriculum in five countries. *Orbis Scholae, 4*(2), 75-87.

Trawick-Smith, J., & Dziurgot, T. (2010). Untangling teacher–child play interactions: Do teacher education and experience influence "good-fit" responses to children's play? *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 31(*2), 106-128.

Trivette, C., Dunst, C., Hamby, D., & Meter, D. (2012). Relationship between early childhood practitioner beliefs and the adoption of innovative and recommended practices. *Research Brief, 6(*1), 1-12.

Trudell, P. (2010). A place for play: Creating complex learning environments. In J. Moyles (Ed.), *Thinking about play: Developing a reflective approach* (pp. 197-212). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). (2006). A *guide to general comment 7: 'Implementing child rights in early childhood'*. Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague. United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. Retrieved from www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm

Van Oers, B., & Duijkers, D. (2013). Teaching in a play-based curriculum: Theory, practice and evidence of developmental education for young children. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 45*(4), 511-534.

Victorian Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (DEECD). (2009). *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.* Retrieved from www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/earlyyears/index.html

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*, translated and edited by M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman. Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press.

Walker, K. (2007). *Play matters: Engaging children in learning. The Australian developmental curriculum – A play and project based philosophy.* Camberwell, AUS: Australian Council for Educational Research.

References

Wallerstedt, C., & Pramling, N. (2012). Learning to play in a goal-directed practice. *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, *32*(1), 5-15.

Walsh, G., Taylor, D., Sproule, L., & McGuinness, C. (2008). *Debating the transition from play-based to formal practice: Implications for early years teachers and policymakers.* Report prepared for Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

Weimer, M. (2013). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice* (2ⁿᵈ ed.). San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass.

Weisberg, D., Zosh, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. (2013). Talking it up: Play, language development, and the role of adult support. *American Journal of Play*, *6*(1), 39–54.

Wen, X., Elicker, J., & McMullen, M. (2011). Early childhood teachers' curriculum beliefs: Are they consistent with observed classroom practices? *Early Education & Development, 22*(6), 945-969. doi: 10.1080/10409289.2010.507495

Wesley, P., & Buysse, V. (2003). Making meaning of school readiness in schools and communities. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 18*(3), 351-375.

White, G., & Sharp, C. (2007). 'It is different … because you are getting older and growing up.' How children make sense of the transition to Year 1. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 15*(1), 87-102.

Whitebread, D., & Bingham, S. (2011). *School readiness: A critical review of perspectives and evidence*. TACTYC Occasional Paper No. 2: TACTYC.

Wilcox-Herzog, A. (2002). Is there a link between teachers' beliefs and behaviors? *Early Education and Development, 13*(1), 81-106.

Wildenger, L., & McIntyre, L. (2011). Family concerns and involvement during Kindergarten transition. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 20*(4), 387-396.

Wildenger, L., & McIntyre, L. (2012). Investigating the relation between kindergarten preparations and child socio-behavioral school outcomes. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 40*(3), 169-176.

Wohlend, K., & Peppler, K. (2015). All rigor and no play is no way to improve learning. *Kapplan*, *96*(8), 22-26.

Wong, S.-m., Wang, Z., & Cheng, D. (2011). A play-based curriculum: Hong Kong children's perceptions of play and non-play. *The International Journal of Learning, 17*(10), 165-180.

Wood, C., & Caulier-Grice, J. (2006). *Fade or flourish: How primary schools can build on children's progress.* London, UK: Social Market Foundation.

Wood, D., Bruner, J. & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17*(2), 89-100.

Wood, E. (1997). Play: Future directions. *Early Years, 17(2)*, 28-33. doi: 10.1080/0957514970170206

Wood, E. (2004). Developing a pedagogy of play. In A. Anning, J. Cullen, & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Early childhood education: Society and culture* (pp. 19-30). London, UK: Sage.

Wood, E. (2009). Conceptualising a pedagogy of play: International perspectives from theory, policy and practice. In D. Kuschner (Ed.), *From children to red hatters: Diverse images and issues of play* (pp. 166-190). Play and Culture Studies volume 8. Lanham: University Press of America.

Wood, E. (2010a). Developing integrated pedagogical approaches to play and learning. In P. Broadhead, J. Howard, & E. Wood (Eds.), *Play and learning in the early years: From research to practice* (pp. 9-26). London, UK: Sage.

Wood, E. (2010b). Reconceptualizing the play-pedagogy relationship: From control to complexity. In L. Brooker & S. Edwards (Eds.), *Engaging play* (pp. 11–24). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Wood, E. (2013). *Play, learning and the early childhood curriculum*. London, UK: Sage.

Wood, E., & Attfield, J. (2005). *Play, learning and the early childhood curriculum.* London, UK: Paul Chapman.

Wood, E., & Bennett, N. (1997). The rhetoric and reality of play: Teachers' thinking and classroom practice. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 17*(2), 22-27.

Wood, E., & Bennett, N. (1999). Progression and continuity in early childhood education: Tensions and contradictions. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 7*(1), 5-16. doi.org/10.1080/0966976990070101

Woodrow, C. (2011). Challenging identities: A case for leadership. In L. Miller & C. Cable (Eds.), *Professionalization, leadership, and management in the early years* (pp. 29-46). London, UK: Sage Publications.

Yeboah, D. (2002). Enhancing transition from early childhood phase to primary education: Evidence from the research literature. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 22*(1), 51-68. doi.org/10.1080/09575140120111517

Yelland, N., Lee, L., O'Rourke, M., & Harrison, C. (2008). *Rethinking learning in early childhood*. London, UK: Open University Press.

Yelland, N. (2011). Reconceptualising play and learning in the lives of young children. *Australasian Journal of Early childhood, 36*(2), 4-12.

Yeo, L., & Clarke, C. (2005). Starting school: A Singapore story told by children. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 30*(3), 1-8.

Yin, R. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage.

.

Smoothing Children's Transition into Formal Schooling: Addressing Complexities in an Early Literacy Initiative in Remote Aboriginal Communities, Northern Territory, Australia

Marguerite Maher · Linda Bellen

Abstract There is a growing awareness that some children transition into formal schooling more readily than others. Compelling evidence indicates that children familiar with the skills and knowledge associated with the dominant practices of literacy teaching in schools have an advantage. While families play a pivotal role in children's early literacy development, there is often a disjuncture between the literacy experiences of children from minority backgrounds and those they encounter on entry into formal schooling. Quality teaching in the prior-to-school setting becomes increasingly important for these children. This paper first examines what research and the literature reveal about successful transitioning of children into formal schooling, successful early literacy practices, and the importance of a quality early childhood education. This sets the backdrop for a description of an early literacy initiative, which took place in six remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, Australia, where all the early childhood educators were under- or un-qualified. Significant aspects emerging from the initiative were: the engagement of the Elders in the community for the implementation of the initiative; the "two-way" learning between the non-Indigenous University mentor and the Aboriginal early childhood educator in each community; the necessity for making Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing a key pillar of the children's literacy learning; the bilingual nature of the initiative; and the University mentors gradually stepping further and further away, moving from teacher, to coach, to mentor, as the skills and confidence of the early childhood educators developed.

Introduction

First we examine what research and the literature reveal about what hinders or helps children's successful transition into formal schooling. We also consider the added complexity for children who live in remote Aboriginal communities and for whom English is a second, third or, sometimes, a fourth language. Early literacy development in that context takes on added dimensions and merits specific attention, particularly when considered alongside issues relating to attracting and retaining early childhood educators in remote and very remote areas. We then discuss the methodology of an early literacy initiative undertaken in six remote Aboriginal communities and discuss the significant elements for success within that initiative.

Transition

Transitions play a significant part throughout our lives and involve a process of change in state from one form, phase or place to another. In most Western cultures, as children begin their passage in the educational process, transitions from one educational setting to another represent an intricate part in their experiences (Laverick 2008). Many children today in Australia have experiences in prior-to

M. Maher (✉) · L. Bellen
School of Education, University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney Campus, Level 6, 128-140 Broadway, Chippendale, NSW 2007, Australia
e-mail: marguerite.maher@nd.edu.au

🐧 Springer

Appendix 1: Publication

school settings, such as preschools, before entering school. The transition to school and the entry to Transition [first year of formal schooling in the Northern Territory (NT), Australia] signify an important event in the lives of children and their families (Ashton et al. 2009; Dail and McGee 2008; Margetts 2009; Rosier and McDonald 2011). This is not only a key experience for children but also for teachers in both preschool settings and Transition (Dail and McGee 2008).

The transition to the first year of formal schooling is multidimensional and complex; it also involves a major change and period of adjustment in children's lives. The transition to school marks a change in their identity and status—that being the shift from a child to a pupil. With this new identity, children need to negotiate all the intricacies of a school's culture, particularly the ways in which teaching and learning is conducted. There is a significant shift from a play-based pedagogy in prior-to-school settings to a more structured, cognitive learning environment in formal schooling [Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) 2008]. It brings with it a mixture of excitement, anxiety and in some instances, substantial challenges (Hirst et al. 2011; Wildenger and McIntyre 2012). Some children will be more successful than others at meeting these challenges (CCCH and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research 2009). A positive start has the potential not only to assist children's future academic and social competence (Dockett et al. 2010), but also to ensure that families and children feel valued and comfortable in school (Dockett and Perry 2008).

Recently in Australia, two significant large scale studies were developed to measure process and impact indicators of the transition to formal schooling: the 2009 Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) and the 2012 Outcomes and Indicators of a Positive Start to School: Development of Framework and Tools research project (Sayers et al. 2012). While such research provides a greater understanding of how to measure outcomes and indicators of positive transitions, it presents little in the way of useful data for those who enact the transition process. Such studies cannot accurately document and describe key processes of continuity and discontinuity in children's transitions to formal schooling.

The transition process is currently a hotly debated topic in both the international and Australian context (Mortlock et al. 2011; Fisher 2011). An extensive amount of this literature deals with collaborative partnerships and home–school links (Giallo et al. 2010; Petrakos and Lehrer 2011; Shields 2009) and many studies deal with school readiness concerns (Clark and Zygmunt-Fillwalk 2008; Noel 2010; Wildenger and McIntyre 2012). The notion of "school readiness" began in the 1990s and has become a central issue in current research on transitions (DiBello and

Neuharth-Pritchett 2008; McGettigan and Gray 2012). Over the last two decades, Australian transition research has centred on binary constructions of children as being either 'ready' or 'unready' for formal schooling (Petriwskyj and Grieshaber 2011). There is compelling research evidence to suggest that the quality of early childhood experiences significantly impacts children's success at school, not only with respect to short-term gains but also in the long term (Logan and Sumsion 2010). One vital aspect to being 'ready' for formal schooling is early literacy development.

The element of transition forms the first part of the backdrop to the research reported in this paper. The second is early literacy development as this is a predictor of later success in school and in life (Hare 2011). We will have a specific focus on implications for Aboriginal children in remote communities, the context of the current study.

Early Literacy Development

Across the world, education systems have not served Indigenous children well. Their literacy achievement is usually behind that of their non-Indigenous peers. In New Zealand, for example, Maori children had a lower level of literacy than any other ethnic group at the end of their first year of schooling (Ministry of Education 2009). In British Columbia, Canada, in excess of 40 % of Aboriginal children did not pass the provincial reading test (Hare 2011). And in Australia, Aboriginal children, particularly those in rural areas, score well below average in literacy benchmarks. The 2012 National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results show that across Australia where only 4.4 % of Year 3 students are below the national minimum standard in reading, the percentage for Indigenous Year 3 students in remote areas was 36 % and in very remote areas this rose to 58 %. In the very remote areas of the NT, where the current study took place, 76 % of Year 3 students were below the minimum standard in reading (ACARA 2012). The ongoing effects of this disparity are seen in adult statistics where Indigenous people reflect low social, economic and health indicators (Hare 2011).

There is comprehensive evidence that young children's early literacy development is vital for their later success in school which in turn influences their success in life (McGill-Franzen 2010; Roberts et al. 2005; Roessingh and Elgie 2009; Senechal et al. 2006). Children who are "familiar with the knowledge and skills associated with the dominant literacy practices of schooling tend to have an advantage" (Hare 2011, p. 390). Often, however, the literacy experiences of children from minority backgrounds are inconsistent with the literacy practices they encounter

Appendix 1: Publication

on entry into formal schooling, leading to a lack of success (Hare 2011; Hornberger 2009; Neuman 2006). Family attitudes to reading and writing have a defining influence on children's print knowledge and reading interest. It is advisable therefore that interventions link, where possible, with families (Weigel et al. 2010).

Additionally, there is a growing body of research that emphasises the need for culturally appropriate programs for Indigenous children (Fluckiger et al. 2012; Fordham and Schwab 2007; Haig-Brown and Dannenmann 2008; Hare 2011; Hare and Anderson 2010; Prochner 2009; Walker and Rodriquez de France 2007). The best outcomes are achieved where there is a respectful "two-way" interchange of cultural and pedagogical knowledge, based on the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as described by Wunungmurra (1989):

> We cannot hold back change which will happen whether we like it or not. But as a minority society we can adapt by finding common ground with the majority society. It is through an exchange of meanings that we can produce a "two-way" school curriculum. In an exchange of knowledge both sides learn from each other instead of the knowledge coming only from the Balanda (White Australian) side. But Yolngu (one Aboriginal people) and Balanda knowledge will only come together if there is respect for our knowledge and where Aboriginal people are taking the initiative, where we shape and develop the educational programs and then implement them. (Wunungmurra 1989, p. 12)

This notion of sharing of Indigenous knowledge so that Indigenous education can be improved while non-Indigenous lecturers share their pedagogical knowledge, has underpinned the current study.

As early literacy development is so important, particularly for children from minority backgrounds, it follows that the quality of teaching in the early years is paramount. The next section of the literature review focuses on teaching quality in the early years and, then, challenges in remote Australian contexts.

Teacher Quality and Qualifications

For all children, the quality of early childhood education is important. The discourse of 'quality' has become a central focus in recent early years educational literature and many researchers, governments and early childhood providers have addressed the issue of quality care and education for young children (Ishimine 2011). This interest was heightened in Australia with the election of the Rudd Government in 2007 and politicians have taken particular interest in early childhood education and care (ECEC) with the ensuing formation of the Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care (OECECC). This has signalled that Australia's Commonwealth Government has recognised the worth of investing in ECEC and has committed to a series of reforms to steer quality improvement. A central concern has been in creating and maintaining high quality childcare and this has been realised in the recent development of a new National Quality Framework (NQF) to guide management of quality to be overseen by quality authority ACECQA—Australian Children's Education & Care Authority (ACECQA 2011). From 2012, this new national, integrated quality and regulatory framework, the NQF, was introduced. A high priority in quality early childhood education is ensuring well-qualified early childhood educators: the higher the qualification, the more likely the service is to provide quality education for the children (Castle 2010).

While Australia across the board is working towards continuous improvement in the quality of ECEC, there are certain idiosyncrasies that make this more problematic in remote communities of the Northern Territory, Australia.

The Northern Territory Context

Indigenous people make up about one-third of NT population, and more than 80 % of Indigenous people in the NT live in remote and very remote areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010). Given the statistics reflecting poor literacy achievement of these children, discussed earlier, the quality of early years education takes on an added significance. The reality, though, is that children who attend preschool in very remote areas, do so for fewer hours per week than those who attend preschool in other areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009a). In urban areas in Australia, children mostly attend Long Day Care; in very remote areas most children attend dedicated preschools, attached to schools—"71 per cent in remote and very remote areas" (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009b, p. 147). This was the case in the six communities of the current study. It would be logical, then, that every effort be made to ensure that the very best early education with the best qualified educators is provided for these children. The reality, however, is that "it is difficult to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of skilled and experienced early childhood education and care workers in rural and remote areas. This difficulty typically increases with remoteness, and is particularly for ECEC teaching positions." (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2011, p. xxxvii). Where it would be optimal to ensure services in remote communities meet the NQF requirements, "since the greater proportion of ECEC staff are unqualified in remote and very remote areas (37 %), …requirements for qualified staff

have been relaxed in order to allow ... services to continue to operate" (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2011, p. 150). Furthermore, disparity between the services offered in remote communities and those in urban areas is set to increase as explained in the Australian Government Productivity Report (2011):

> Current demand for ECEC workers for Indigenous children is not being met. Many Indigenous-focused ECEC services will initially be excluded from the National Quality Standards (NQS). As a result, as the NQS is applied to mainstream services, the gap between the quality of mainstream services and those for Indigenous children is likely to be exacerbated. (p. 259)

The current study is set against this backdrop and was premised on the desire to smooth the transition of the children in the communities into formal schooling by providing a culturally appropriate early literacy program to enhance their literacy skills. The principles of culturally responsive teaching, notably that "the education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should connect in-school learning to out-of-schoolliving; promote educational equity and excellence;... and develop students' agency, efficacy, and empowerment" (Gay 2013, p. 49) were used to guide practice.

The Current Study

In the current study, through the "Closing the Gap" strategy in the NT under the then *Northern Territory Emergency Response Act 2007* (Australian Government 2007), funding was secured and ethics approval gained to link one Charles Darwin University academic to each of six preschools, attached to primary schools, in six remote Indigenous communities in the NT of Australia. The six communities were very remote—the closest one being a 3-h plus drive from Darwin. Most were only accessible from Darwin by plane.

Research Questions

The overarching research question was: *How can non-Indigenous lecturers work in remote Aboriginal communities to enhance children's transition into formal schooling?* This question was interlinked with the second: *How can children's cultural capacity be built upon to enhance their literacy skills from a Western perspective?* The wording of this question demonstrates deep respect for the communities' and children's literacy capacity within their own culture. The purpose of the current project, however, was to empower these same children to be able to staircase

into formal schooling where literacy from a Western perspective would be dominant. The third question was: *How can successes and lessons learnt from the project be sustained beyond the life of the project?*

Methodology

In the current context where all lecturers were, for the first time, working collaboratively within the two-way philosophy out in remote Aboriginal communities, there were considerable professional learning issues relating not only to understanding the new approach to teaching and learning but also to planning to work in pedagogically responsive ways with the community Elders, the early childhood educators and the children themselves.

Self-study is one form of teacher research that has become more frequently utilised since the 1990s. Qualitative and naturalistic approaches to research and inquiry in education have taken on greater significance since then together with the growing acceptance of the value of action research where the importance of *self* is highlighted. Specifically the contribution of scholars within phenomenology and narrative research has significantly impacted practitioners seeing themselves as researchers (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001).

While there are definitional issues concerning self-study, most descriptions centre on teacher educators studying their own practice; this often includes the self. "Self-study points to a simple truth, that to study a practice is simultaneously to study self: a study of self-in-relation to other" (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001, p. 14). Other self-study features identified by Loughran and Russell (2008) point to the value of collaborative self-study when they discuss the need for checking data and interpretations with others, the difficulty for individuals to reframe their interpretations of their experiences on their own, and the value of colleagues in the *shared adventure*. While the focus of self-study is often on professional learning, there are other sometimes overlapping reasons for taking such an approach. These include enhancing self-knowledge, constructing new knowledge, uncovering the real story of what might be occurring in a context, and celebrating success in learning. Reflecting on a number of self-studies, Loughran et al. (2002) identified benefits from self-study such as increasing the ability of teachers to take risks with innovations, developing the ability to articulate their beliefs and practice and, where collaboration was involved, to reframe these with new ideas and practices. Other beneficial outcomes were the ability to challenge existing practices and provide "new visions of what is possible" (Loughran et al. 2002, p. 255), deeper understanding of learning and changing learning patterns and, from this, innovations in practice. Specifically, self-study is an extension reflective practice which has public

Appendix 1: Publication

dimensions in the sense that it intends to create and communicate new knowledge and understandings.

For these reasons, the university steering committee of the current project favoured this methodology. First, there was opportunity for lecturers to engage in individual and collaborative reflection; second, the early childhood educators in the project could become co-teachers together with the lecturers; third, since the implementation model was innovative there would potentially be the creation of new knowledge.

Phase 1

A 6-month period of preparation was undertaken by the university coordinator of this project, one of the authors of this paper, a non-Indigenous woman, making links with the community Elders in the first instance to discuss the project and seek their input into any value they might discern; the power of decision-making was left with them. When they were supportive of the project, the university coordinator then met with Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders within the schools where the preschools were attached. She could thus gain their perceptions of advantages and challenges of the project and to tailor the implementation to their specific requirements.

Reflecting their need for assurance that this project was not yet another colonising exercise, Elders at one community wanted to know if it would mean the teacher would have to leave the community, if she wanted to up-skill, in which case they would not wish to participate. At another, they wanted to be sure there would be no financial disadvantage to families if children did not wish to attend the preschool within this initiative. At a third site, where a number of different family groups, or "skin groups" as they called them, were represented, Elders wanted to know if mothers of children would still be welcome at the preschool where the teacher was not of their skin group or language. At that time the mothers, who were multilingual, translated for the children, and they wanted the assurance that the current mentoring and support would not be affected. At several sites the Elders wanted to know if their language or English would be used and, when given the choice, almost all wanted both to be used with the children, although one site wanted more English to be used. While supportive of an initiative which held the potential to improve outcomes for their children, Elders were clear that they did not want the current positives of the preschool within their community compromised in any way. The way the introduction and the whole project unfolded ensured that they were the leaders, the decision-makers and the drivers of change of topic or focus as the project progressed over 2 years.

The final part of the preparation took place when the coordinator of the project met with the teachers in the preschools who would be pivotal in the success or otherwise of the program and who had already been mandated by their communities to be a part of the project. At all times, the community members were in partnership with the university academic and the researcher in the completion of this project.

Phase 2

The academics involved in the project worked for 2 years with preschool teachers, 4-year-old children and their families to enhance the children's literacy skills on entry into formal schooling at age five. All the lecturers were non-Indigenous but had experience in working previously with Indigenous people; from its conception, the project made Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing key pillars of children's learning. Additionally, the aim was to empower the early childhood educator, regardless of whether or not that person had formal qualifications or whether they were Indigenous or non-Indigenous, to want to implement the program, to be able to implement the program, to be able to articulate why these strategies were important to children's learning, and to continue with the initiative at the end of 2 years. At all costs, the traps that some government funded initiatives had fallen into would be avoided—such as insisting on practice without ownership by the people, or preaching from a Western perspective that this way is best. The lecturers needed to build on the positive aspects of Indigenous culture and negotiate with the local Indigenous community understanding of the premise of any innovation.

The potential sense of isolation that lecturers might feel working alone in their community was ameliorated by the project blog as it allowed for asynchronous communication. Through the steering committee meetings with lecturers, it was possible to extrapolate the principles of what seemed to be successful practice in one site, for consideration in other sites, epitomising collaborative self-study. Since the early childhood educators were equal partners in the process, they soon took part in the collaborative blog discussions and a little community of learners developed.

Findings

One Site Described in Detail as an Example

To protect the privacy of the remote Indigenous community, the term Community X is used to identify the people of this community. At the start of the project in Community X, a situational analysis showed that there was little focus

255

on written texts in the preschool. The oral tradition within the community was extremely strong, visual representation through traditional art work was highly prized and there was evidence of these in the preschool, but few books were available.

The lecturer, working with the preschool teacher who had no formal early childhood education qualification but who was a highly respected member of Community X, discussed how they might bring the children's lived experience into the classroom. Collaboratively they decided that all children would be given a disposable camera to take photos of things that interested them. The pictures were uploaded into the computer and each child dictated the text for an original book. Each child's book was produced not only for that child but also for all of their classmates, and a 'big book' was made of each child's story. A book case was provided to each home and the children could take their book and their friends' books home and keep them there.

They loved their books and were fascinated with their friends' books too, "reading" them to family members and getting family members to read to them. One child focussed on body parts and had as his text on each page "This is Tyron's foot" or "This is Lucy's ear". Many had taken photos of their tree, their river, their mountain. Some had taken photos of a fishing expedition, or family members doing art work. Many included photos of artwork done by family members. The decision was made by Community X Elders that the text should be in both English and their language to gradually improve children's English ability prior to entry into formal schooling.

Next there was a whole community expedition to country—their traditional lands. The Elders told dreamtime stories and they sang and danced. Photos were taken throughout and books were made of that expedition. The children were enchanted both with the stories told by the Elders, but also by the books that ensued. To smooth the transition of the children from preschool into formal schooling, it was important to include these books in both the preschool and the classroom in which they undertook their first year of formal schooling. Having the Elders involved in the project, actively supporting it, and checking on its progress throughout the 2 years, provided the continued motivation of both preschool and school teachers to promote the reading aligned with the project.

Soon, commercially produced picture books could be introduced into the preschool. Some of these, such as *The naked boy and the crocodile: Stories by children from remote Indigenous communities* (Griffiths 2011), about playing with friends, searching for emu eggs, hunting wild pigs and picking berries, were reflective of the local Indigenous culture. By now children were completely enamoured of reading and in a preschool, which adopted a free play philosophy, the children would choose to spend protracted periods reading, often in groups, talking and discussing, with deep concentration focussing on the fine detail of the pictures. Finally, a wonderful array of children's picture books was provided; they were excited with each new one that was introduced. These were English books and while no formal English competency pre- and post-assessment was undertaken with the children, anecdotally their English proficiency developed exponentially over the 2 years (Record of Steering Committee 2011).

At the same time the teacher in the preschool became keen to up-skill and it was made possible for her to complete a Certificate III in Children's Services during the project. There is no doubt that this early childhood educator was empowered and motivated to engage the children in literacy activities and their transition to formal schooling has been shown to be uncomplicated in that the children had all the pre-reading skills and attitudes necessary to engage with teaching in the formal classroom (Record of Steering Committee 2012).

Research Question One: Non-Indigenous Lecturers Working Effectively in Aboriginal Communities

This methodology seemed to have enhanced providing an answer to the overarching research question of how non-Indigenous lecturers could work in Aboriginal communities to enhance the transition of children into formal schooling. Having the Elders take the initiative and drive it with the community was key and this was achieved through all six communities. In this project, the relationship between the lecturers and the community stakeholders was so much more than just a professional one. Lecturers were taken to country and were invited into a family within their community.

Research Question Two: Building Upon Children's Cultural Capital

Respect for Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing and making these a key pillar in the project was pivotal to the success. As described, the children were enticed into reading by recording in the traditional Western way of a book, their daily lives and experiences. Recording elements of their culture, such as dancing and the telling of their dreamtime stories in picture books, helped introduce them to the wonder of books and reading generally.

Research Question Three: Sustainability—A Limitation

The project was funded for 2 years and the data in the current study demonstrate deep engagement on the part of the community stakeholders; nevertheless, there is always the question of sustainability. By 2013, three of the

Appendix 1: Publication

principals of schools in the communities have left and been replaced with people from outside the communities who will not have been on the journey. It is not known if they will continue to support the leadership role of the Elders in the ongoing practice. Ethics approval is currently being sought to conduct follow-up research with remaining stakeholders to establish their views on the strengths of the project and any areas of improvement they might be able to suggest, now with the wisdom of hindsight, and whether the initiatives have been sustained.

Discussion

Implications Within Australia

Building on the knowledge from other studies, such as that of how to improve literacy learning through family–school and community-led partnerships (Fluckiger et al. 2012), in the current study, the researcher spent 6 months, prior to the implementation of the initiative, building the relationship and trust required for the Elders and the communities to take ownership of the project. This was key to its success on several levels. The community mandated who the early childhood educators should be in the implementation of this initiative and they consequently persevered when there were problems such as the University mentor not being able to visit the community for several weeks during the Wet season when the roads became impassable.

Following authors such as Ashton et al. (2009) the importance of home–school links was prioritised in this project. This was firstly achieved by the Elders supporting the initiative and taking all in the community to country, ensuring all families were involved. Secondly, they suggested that the bookcase should take pride of place in the house, that parents should encourage their children to read the books that came home, and that they read books with the children. This advice, coming from the Elders and not the University lecturer, was readily accepted. The home–school links were enhanced, a vital factor influencing children's success at school (Giallo et al. 2010; Petrakos and Lehrer 2011; Shields 2009).

Pivotal to the success of the program was the lecturer-early childhood educator relationship. This was enhanced by such aspects as the visit to country where the Aboriginal educator was the expert and the lecturer the learner. This set the foundation for continued "two-way" learning (Wunungmurra 1989) as the lecturer increased her cultural capacity whilst assisting the educator to improve her pedagogical knowledge and skills.

In all the communities, making children's cultural knowledge a key pillar in their learning saw enhanced engagement with literacy activities (Fluckiger et al. 2012;

Fordham and Schwab 2007; Haig-Brown and Dannenmann 2008; Hare 2011; Hare and Anderson 2010; Prochner 2009; Walker and Rodriquez de France 2007). This was in effect an extension of the "two-way" learning experienced by lecturer and early childhood educator, but now applied to the children's learning. In the detailed example provided, this was achieved through the children reporting on their lives and through the photos and books about the visit to country. Additionally, children spontaneously re-enacted the day while they were reading the books, doing the dances, retelling the dreamtime stories, choosing to do traditional-style artwork themselves and then telling the story depicted in their artwork. Their love of books and reading stands them in good stead (McGill-Franzen 2010; Roberts et al. 2005; Roessingh and Elgie 2009; Senechal et al. 2006).

The bilingual nature of the implementation of this initiative appears to have paid good dividends. Had English been the sole focus, it is possible that children as well as community members might have lost interest. However, the use of both English and the mother tongue, in addition to increasing amounts of English as commercially produced picture books were introduced, led not only to increased literacy skills amongst the children, but improved English proficiency as well. These children are well placed to have a positive transition into formal schooling (Hirst et al. 2011; Wildenger and McIntyre 2012).

Key to the success of this program was that the lecturer increasingly withdrew from being the initiator of ideas and became more coach, then mentor, then friend and equal, a learner together with the teacher. In the site described in detail, this method had several positive outcomes as it impacted positively on the positioning of the Indigenous teacher's self-efficacy and agency as she saw herself being successful in the Western academy, by completing the Certificate III in Children Services, as well as augmenting her success and worth within her own context. Being in the role of teacher and enhancing the lecturer's cultural capacity was a powerful outcome for both (Wunungmurra 1989).

As with any project, the players change and leave. With the current initiative, however, having the Elders as the driving force and not the University lecturer, essentially an outsider, it is more likely that the positives of this project can be preserved into the future.

Implications Internationally

Effective literacy initiatives for Indigenous children take into account cultural ways of knowing and working together with communities and families to build trusting partnerships that empower them to achieve commonly developed goals. Such projects that are culturally safe and

257

Appendix 1: Publication

focus on children's specific cultural knowledge are central to ensuring positive literacy outcomes. Positioning community Elders or family members as key contributors and affording them ownership of projects significantly contributes to the success of these programs. Other essential features include the involvement of staff, either Indigenous and who hold local knowledge, or non-Indigenous and are trained in developing culturally relevant practice. International communities who derive insights from this research need to consider the importance of such professional development and training for staff involved in facilitating successful transitions to school for Indigenous children.

Conclusion

The research conducted to date in this project has shown promising early literacy outcomes for young Aboriginal Australian children and has contributed to more effective transitions to formal schooling. Such initiatives are vital for ensuring the change to more positive learning trajectories for these children early in their schooling years. It becomes progressively costly and more difficult to change these pathways as children grow older. The nature of the relationships between those involved has important implications for smoothing these transitions. A vision of shared responsibility in children's literacy development between home and school contexts is necessary to foster culturally responsive teaching. Engaging meaningfully and collaboratively with community Elders and affording them ownership in the development of such projects are crucial elements to their cultural appropriateness and success. A key factor is the use of children's funds of cultural knowledge (Moll et al. 1992) from their home and community experiences to help validate their identity as competent and engaged learners. Early literacy initiatives that embody quality teaching with qualified educators who affirm children's cultural knowledge play an integral role in supporting effective transitions to formal schooling.

References

Ashton, J., Woodrow, C., Johnston, C., Wangmann, J., Singh, L., & James, T. (2009). Partnerships in learning: Linking early childhood services, families, and schools for optimal development. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 33*(2), 10–16.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2009a). *Childhood education and care, Australia, June 2008.* Cat. No. 4402.0. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2009b). *Experimental estimated resident Australian Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, State and Territories, remoteness areas.* Cat. No. 3238.0.55.0001. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2010). *Population characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006.* Cat. No. 4713.0. Canberra: Australian Government.

Australian Children's Education & Care Authority (ACECQA). (2011). *Guide to the National Quality Standard.* Retrieved January 10, 2013, from www.acecqa.gov.au.

Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2012). *NAPLAN national report.* Retrieved January 5, 2013, from www.nap.edu.au/results-and-reports/naplan-results/results.html.

Australian Government. (2007). *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007.* http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Series/C2007A00129.

Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early childhood development workforce: Productivity commission draft research report.* Melbourne, VIC: Commonwealth of Australia.

Bullough, R., & Pinnegar, S. (2001). Guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study research. *Educational Researcher, 30*(1), 13–21.

Castle, K. (2010). *Early childhood teacher research: From questions to results.* New York: Routledge.

Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH). (2008). *Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years services-Policy Brief No 11, Translating early childhood research evidence to inform policy and practice.* Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital. Retrieved January 3, 2013, from www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB11_Transition_to_school.pdf.

Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. (2009). *A snapshot of early childhood development in Australia. Australian early development index (AEDI) National Report 2009.* Canberra, VIC: Australian Government.

Clark, P., & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, E. (2008). Ensuring school readiness through a successful transition to kindergarten: The Indiana ready schools initiative. *Childhood Education, 84*(5), 287–293. doi:10.1080/00094056.2008.10523026.

Dail, A. R., & McGee, L. M. (2008). Transition to kindergarten: Reaching back to preschoolers and parents through shared summer school. *Childhood Education, 84*(5), 305–310. doi:10.1080/00094056.2008.10523031.

DiBello, L., & Neuharth-Pritchett, S. (2008). Perspectives on school readiness and pre-kindergarten programs: An introduction. *Childhood Education, 84*(5), 256–259. doi:10.1080/00094056.2008.10523021.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2008). Starting school: A community endeavour. *Childhood Education, 84*(5), 274–280. doi:10.1080/00094056.2008.10523024.

Dockett, S., Perry, B., & Kearney, E. (2010). *School readiness: What does it mean for Indigenous children, families, schools and communities?* (Issues Paper No. 2). Melbourne, VIC: Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.

Fisher, J. (2011). Building on the early years foundation stage: Developing good practice for transition into Key Stage 1. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 31*(1), 31–42. doi:10.1080/09575146.2010.512557.

Fluckiger, B., Diamond, P., & Jones, W. (2012). Yarning space: Leading literacy learning through family–school partnerships. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 37*(3), 53–59.

Fordham, A. M., & Schwab, R. G. (2007). *Education, training and Indigenous futures: CAEPR policy research: 1990–2007.* Canberra, ACT: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.

Gay, G. (2013). Teaching to and through cultural diversity. *Curriculum Inquiry, 43*(1), 48–70.

Giallo, R., Treyvaud, K., Matthews, J., & Keinhuis, M. (2010). Making the transition to primary school: An evaluation of a

transition program for parents. *Australian Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology, 10,* 1–17.

Griffiths, A. (2011). *The naked boy and the crocodile: Stories by children from remote Indigenous communities.* Sydney, NSW: Macmillan.

Haig-Brown, C., & Dannenmann, K. (2008). The land is the first teacher: The Indigenous knowledge instructor's program. In Z. Bekerman & E. Kopelowitz (Eds.), *Cultural education and cultural stability: Minority, diaspora, Indigenous and ethnoreligious groups in multi-cultural societies* (pp. 247–266). New York: Routledge.

Hare, J. (2011). 'They tell a story and there's meaning behind that story': Indigenous knowledge and young Indigenous children's literacy learning. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 12*(4), 389–414.

Hare, J., & Anderson, J. (2010). Transitions to early childhood education and care for Indigenous children and families in Canada: Historical and social realities. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 35*(2), 19–27.

Hirst, M., Jervis, N., Visagie, K., Sojo, V., & Cavanagh, S. (2011). *Transition to primary school: A review of the literature.* Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.

Hornberger, N. H. (2009). Multilingual education policy and practice: Ten certainties (grounded in Indigenous experience). *Language Teaching, 42*(1), 197–211.

Ishimine, K. (2011). Quality in early childhood education and care: A case study of disadvantage. *Australian Educational Researcher, 38*(3), 257–274.

Laverick, D. (2008). Starting school: Welcoming young children and families into early school experiences. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 35*(4), 321–326.

Logan, H., & Sumsion, J. (2010). Early childhood teachers' understandings of and provision for quality. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 35*(3), 42–50.

Loughran, J., Mitchell, I., & Mitchell, J. (Eds.). (2002). *Learning from teacher research.* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Loughran, J., & Russell, T. (2008). Understanding teaching and learning through self-study. *Studying Teacher Education, 4*(1), 1–3.

Margetts, K. (2009). Early transition and adjustment and children's adjustment after six years of schooling. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 17*(3), 309–324.

McGettigan, I., & Gray, C. (2012). Perspectives on school readiness in rural Ireland: The experiences of parents and children. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 20*(1), 15–29.

McGill-Franzen, A. (2010). The National Early Literacy Panel Report: Summary commentary, and reflections on policies and practices to improve children's early literacy. *Educational Researcher, 39*(4), 275–278.

Ministry of Education. (2009). *Nga haeta matauranga: The annual report on Maori Education 2001/8.* Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. www.sonoma.edu/users/f/filp/ed415/moll.pdf?.

Mortlock, A., Plowman, N., & Glasgow, A. (2011). Transition to school: A principles approach. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work, 8*(2), 94–103.

Neuman, S. B. (2006). The knowledge gap: Implications for early education. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol. 2). New York: Guilford Press.

Noel, A. (2010). Perceptions of school readiness in one Queensland primary school. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 35*(2), 28–35.

Petrakos, H., & Lehrer, J. (2011). Parents' and teachers' perceptions of transition practices in kindergarten. *Exceptionality Education International, 21*(2), 62–73.

Petriwskyj, A., & Grieshaber, S. (2011). Critical perspectives on the transition to school: Reframing the debate. In A. Laverick & M. Jalongo (Eds.), *Transitions to early care and education: International perspectives on making schools ready for young children* (pp. 75–86). Dortrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

Prochner, L. (2009). *History of early childhood education in Canada, Australia and New Zealand.* Vancouver: UBC Press.

Record of Steering Committee. (2011). Held by author.

Record of Steering Committee. (2012). Held by author.

Roberts, J., Jurgens, J., & Burchinal, M. (2005). The role of home literacy practices in preschool children's emergent literacy skills. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research, 48*(2), 345–359.

Roessingh, H., & Elgie, S. (2009). Early language and literacy development among young English language learners: Preliminary insights from a longitudinal study. *TESL Canada Journal, 26*(2), 24–45.

Rosier, K., & McDonald, M. (2011). *Promoting positive education and care transitions for children. Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) Resource sheet.* Melbourne, VIC: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Sayers, M., West, S., Lorains, J., Laidlaw, B., Moore, T., & Robinson, R. (2012). Starting school: A pivotal life transition for children and their families. *Family Matters, 90,* 45–56.

Senechal, M., Ouellette, G., & Rodney, D. (2006). The misunderstood giant: On the predictive role of early vocabulary to future reading. In D. K. Dickinson & S. B. Neuman (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol. 2, pp. 173–182). New York: Guilford Press.

Shields, P. (2009). 'School doesn't feel as much of a partnership': Parents' perceptions of their children's transition from nursery school to reception class. *Early Years, 29*(3), 237–248.

Walker, R., & Rodriquez de France, C. (2007). Historical look at early childhood education in light of the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi and the Maori self-determination movement. *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 30*(1), 28–40.

Weigel, D. J., Martin, S. S., & Bennett, K. K. (2010). Pathways to literacy: Connections between family assets and preschool children's emergent literacy skills. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 8*(1), 5–22.

Wildenger, L., & McIntyre, L. (2012). Investigating the relation between kindergarten preparations and child socio-behavioral school outcomes. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 40,* 169–176.

Wunungmurra, W. (1989). Dhawurrpunaramirr—Finding the common ground for a new Aboriginal curriculum. *Ngoonjook: A Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues, 2,* 7–19.

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
AUSTRALIA

Cnr Broadway and Abercrombie Street (PO Box 944)
Broadway, New South Wales 2007
Telephone: (02) 8204 4400
Email: sydney@nd.edu.au
Internet: www.sydney.nd.edu.au

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Interview Schedule

Project Title: Teacher Beliefs about Play-Based Pedagogy and Pedagogic Continuity in Children's Transition from Preschool to Formal Schooling.

Proposed interview questions. Interview questions may differ slightly from those listed below. Date, time and place to be proposed by the interviewees.

Introduction:

- Inform teachers that the purpose of this interview is to explore teachers' beliefs about the value of play-based pedagogy to promote pedagogic continuity in children's transition from preschool to formal schooling.

- Stress that there are no right or wrong answers. It is each teacher's opinions that are valuable. We do not know the answers, and we are hoping they can help us understand the issues we ask about.

- Inform them that their identity will never be revealed. Ask what alias they want me to use when reporting on their data. Write alias name beside their real name on your information sheet.

- Get their address, so that I can send them a copy of the interview transcript, so they can change anything they want to, or remove any information they want to.

- Ask if they mind taping the interview, so we will be accurate in reporting what they say. This is because everything they say is very important, and we simply cannot write fast enough, but don't want to miss anything they say. Anything they do not want reported they can preface with "this not to be quoted".

- Start tape recorder: Say "Interview with ___ (alias) on ___ (date)."

Schedule of approximate Interview Questions:

1. What is your understanding about play as a medium for learning?
2. Please describe your personal beliefs about using play as a medium for learning.
3. How do you implement play as a medium for learning in your preschool room/Kindergarten class?
4. Do you provide opportunities for teaching through play? Why/why not?
5. Can you give me some examples of what play-based learning looks like in your room/Kindergarten class?
6. How would you describe your role when using play as a medium for learning?
7. What is your understanding of pedagogic continuity (continuity of learning and teaching)?
8. In your personal view, do you feel it is important that teachers consider pedagogic continuity for children entering the Kindergarten year? Why/Why not?
9. What do you think are key considerations for continuity of learning for children transitioning to Kindergarten?
10. How do you feel your teaching practices accommodate for continuity of learning when children transition from preschool to the Kindergarten year?
11. What factors do you think affect your decision to implement play-based learning/using play as a medium for learning?
12. What, if any, obstacles are there evident in using play as a medium for learning in your centre/school?

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
AUSTRALIA

Cnr Broadway and Abercrombie Street (PO Box 944)
Broadway, New South Wales 2007
Telephone: (02) 8204 4400
Email: sydney@nd.edu.au
Internet: www.sydney.nd.edu.au

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Teacher Beliefs about Play-Based Pedagogy and Pedagogic Continuity in Children's Transition from Preschool to Formal Schooling

Dear [Name of Preschool Teacher/Kindergarten Teacher],

Plain language statement to teacher about research study

I am a post-graduate student from the University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study as part of the requirements for completing a Doctor of Philosophy degree. I, Linda Bellen, am the principal researcher in this study. My study will explore preschool and Kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the value of play-based pedagogy to promote pedagogic continuity in children's transition from preschool to formal schooling.

Your participation will consist of *one* in-depth semi-structured interview (approximately 60 minutes duration) in which I would ask you questions about your beliefs about play as a vehicle for learning and your role in using play within your teaching. I am investigating whether play as pedagogy can contribute to seamless transitions for children into formal schooling. This pedagogic continuity in supporting children's transition from preschool to formal schooling is a new area of research interest nationally and internationally.

My anticipated interview schedule will be from [Month/Year to Month/Year]. This session would be scheduled at your convenience in a comfortable public setting. With your permission I plan to audio-tape this interview in order to ensure accuracy and to minimise any misunderstanding or misinterpretation. An Informed Consent form is attached for your review before you grant permission. This study has received ethical clearance by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney. Please note that this research has been approved by the school's/centre's principal/director.

All responses are strictly confidential. The sample size for this study is small and this may have implications for the protection of participants' identity. Anonymity is assured inasmuch as a pseudonym will be used for any names (individual or centre/school) so that you CANNOT be identified. There are no pre-determined 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to decline answering any questions, to withdraw consent in the study or withdraw any previously supplied date before the final analysis without prejudice. After transcription of the interview, your answers will be verified by you to ensure intended meanings have been captured accurately. You will be given a report on the findings of my study. All data from this research will be stored securely by the researcher for five years following the study and will then be destroyed.

I look forward to working with you. I would appreciate if you could please return the consent form to me by Date/Month/Year. If you have any concerns or queries regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, they can be directed to the Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee, Research Office, The University of Notre Dame Australia, PO Box 1225 Fremantle WA 6959, phone (08) 9433 0943, research@nd.edu.au. For any other questions regarding the research, please contact me (see details below) or my supervisor Professor Marguerite Maher on (02) 8204 4417.

Thank you for your consideration,

Linda Bellen
Doctor of Philosophy candidate, University of Notre Dame
Mob: 0423 352 607   Email: linda.bellen@nd.edu.au

THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME AUSTRALIA

Cnr Broadway and Abercrombie Street (PO Box 944)
Broadway, New South Wales 2007
Telephone: (02) 8204 4400
Email: sydney@nd.edu.au
Internet: www.sydney.nd.edu.au

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Teachers' Beliefs about Play-Based Pedagogy and Pedagogic Continuity in Children's Transition from Preschool to Formal Schooling

Date

Dear [Name of Preschool Director],

Request for permission to carry out research study

Your centre is invited to participate in my post-graduate research study to explore teachers' beliefs about the value of play-based pedagogy to promote pedagogy continuity in children's transition from preschool to formal schooling. I, Linda Bellen, am the principal researcher in this study. This research study forms part of the course work for the Doctor of Philosophy degree which I am completing at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney. This study is supervised by Professor Marguerite Maher, Dean of Education at the university. Please see the attached plain language statement describing the study.

I wish to gain permission to approach and recruit **one preschool teacher** who works with 4-5 year old children (those about to transition to formal schooling) and who consents to participate in my study by means of one semi-structured interview. The teacher will receive a report on my findings of the study. My interview schedule is intended to begin in September, 2013 and to be completed by December, 2013.

Study findings will be reported in a way that ensures the responses from an individual or preschool CANNOT be identified. All responses are strictly confidential. Particular care will be taken to ensure anonymity through the use of pseudonyms for both individual teachers and preschool centre names. Participation is voluntary. Participants have the right to decline answering any questions and to withdraw their participation in this research at any time before the final analysis without prejudice. Data will be kept secure and destroyed after five years.

This research project has the approval of the NSW Department of Education and Communities and the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of The University of Notre Dame Australia. If participants have any concerns or queries regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, they can be directed to the Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee, Research Office, The University of Notre Dame Australia, PO Box 1225 Fremantle WA 6959, phone (08) 9433 0943, research@nd.edu.au.

For the purpose of this study, the term *preschool teacher* applies to university trained teachers with a minimum of one year's teaching experience working with children aged 4-5 years.

I look forward to working with your centre and staff member. If you have any questions about the research, please contact me or my supervisor Professor Marguerite Maher on (02) 8204 4417. I look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Linda Bellen
Mob: 0423 352 607
linda.bellen@nd.edu.au

THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME AUSTRALIA

Cnr Broadway and Abercrombie Street (PO Box 944)
Broadway, New South Wales 2007
Telephone: (02) 8204 4400
Email: sydney@nd.edu.au
Internet: www.sydney.nd.edu.au

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Teachers' Beliefs about Play-Based Pedagogy and Pedagogic Continuity in Children's Transition from Preschool to Formal Schooling

Date

Dear [Name of Principal],

Request for permission to carry out research study

Your school is invited to participate in my post-graduate research study to explore teachers' beliefs about the value of play-based pedagogy to promote pedagogy continuity in children's transition from preschool to formal schooling. I, Linda Bellen, am the principal researcher in this study. This research study forms part of the course work for the Doctor of Philosophy degree which I am completing at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney. This course work is supervised by Professor Marguerite Maher, Dean of Education at the university. Please see the attached plain language statement describing the study.

I wish to gain permission to approach and recruit *one Kindergarten teacher* who currently works with Kindergarten children and who consents to participate in my study by means of one semi-structured interview. The teacher will receive a report on my findings of the study. My interview schedule is intended to begin in May, 2013 and to be completed by June, 2013.

Study findings will be reported in a way that ensures the responses from an individual or school CANNOT be identified. All responses are strictly confidential. Particular care will be taken to ensure anonymity through the use of pseudonyms for both individual teachers and school names. Participation is voluntary. Participants have the right to decline answering any questions and to withdraw their participation in this research at any time before the final analysis without prejudice. Data will be kept secure and destroyed after five years.

This research project has the approval of the NSW Department of Education and Communities and the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of The University of Notre Dame Australia. If participants have any concerns or queries regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, they should be directed to the Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee, Research Office, The University of Notre Dame Australia, PO Box 1225 Fremantle WA 6959, phone (08) 9433 0943, research@nd.edu.au.

For the purpose of this study, the term *Kindergarten teacher* applies to university trained teachers with a minimum of one year's teaching experience working with children in a Kindergarten class.

I look forward to working with your school and staff member. If you have any questions about the research, please contact me or my supervisor Professor Marguerite Maher on (02) 8204 4417. I look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,
Linda Bellen
Mob: 0423 352 607
linda.bellen@nd.edu.au

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

Cnr Broadway and Abercrombie Street (PO Box 944)
Broadway, New South Wales 2007
Telephone: (02) 8204 4400
Email: sydney@nd.edu.au
Internet: www.sydney.nd.edu.au

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Teachers' Beliefs about Play-Based Pedagogy and Pedagogic Continuity in Children's Transition from Preschool to Formal Schooling

Declaration of Consent to Participate for Teachers

☐ I understand that this study is for research purposes only.

☐ I have read and understood the plain language statement provided about this research project.

☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time prior to publication of the findings without prejudice.

☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify me or my workplace.

☐ I understand that the sample size for this study is small and this may have implications for the protection of my identity. Anonymity is assured inasmuch as a pseudonym will be used so that I cannot be identified.

☐ I understand that all data from this research will be stored securely by the researcher for five years following the study and will then be destroyed or erased.

☐ I understand that the interview will be audio-taped.

☐ I understand that I will be provided with the opportunity to review and verify the interview transcript for accuracy of meaning.

☐ I understand that there are legal limitations to data confidentiality and in the extremely unlikely event data from this study may be subject to subpoena.

☐ I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this study and email details are provided below for this purpose.

☐ I understand that this consent form will be retained by the researcher once signed and returned.

By ticking the selected boxes above and signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Date: _____   Name: _____

Signature: _____Email: _____

Please *return this completed consent form* by **Date/Month/Year**.

Thank you for your contribution to this study.
Linda Bellen, Principal Researcher
linda.bellen@nd.edu.au