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

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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.
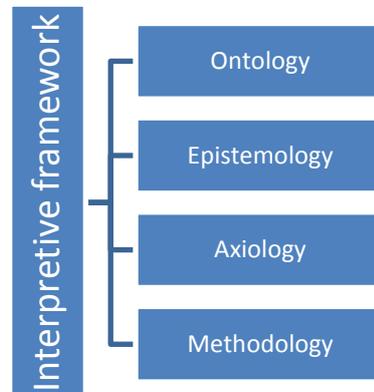

Figure 3.1   Interpretive framework for the current study

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.
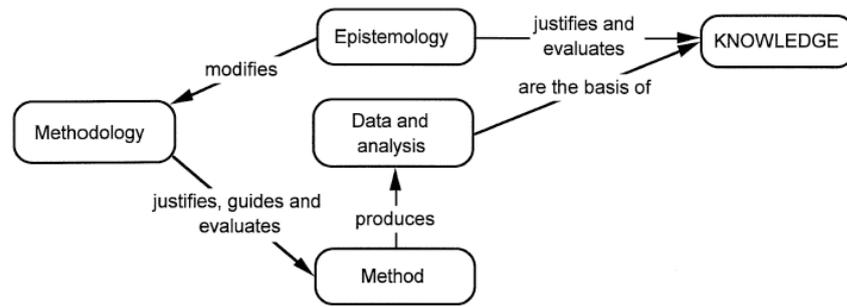
Figure 3.2   The relationship between epistemology, methodology and method (from Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1317)

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.
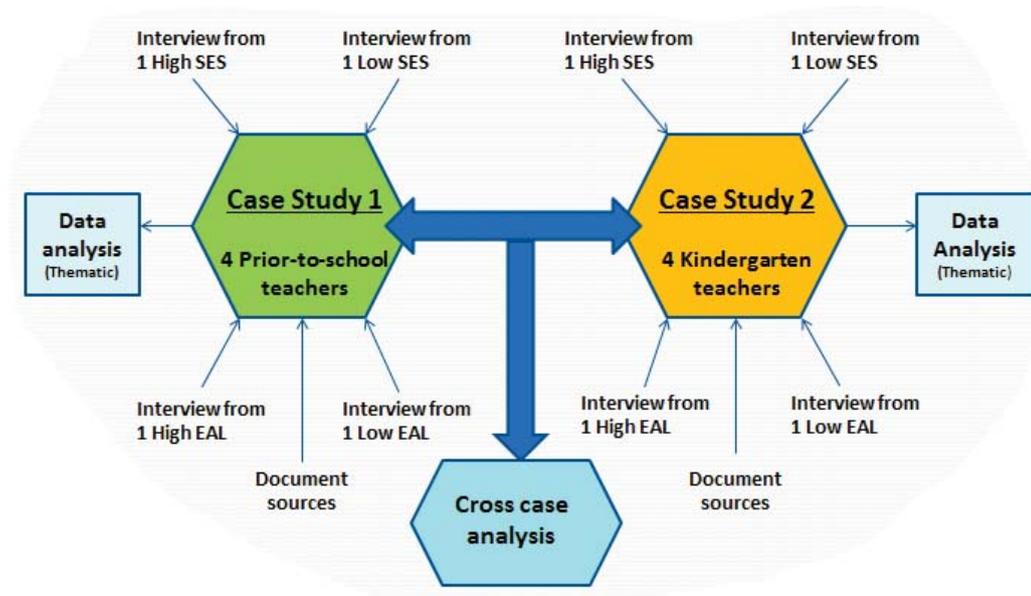

Figure 3.3   Case study design for the current study

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.
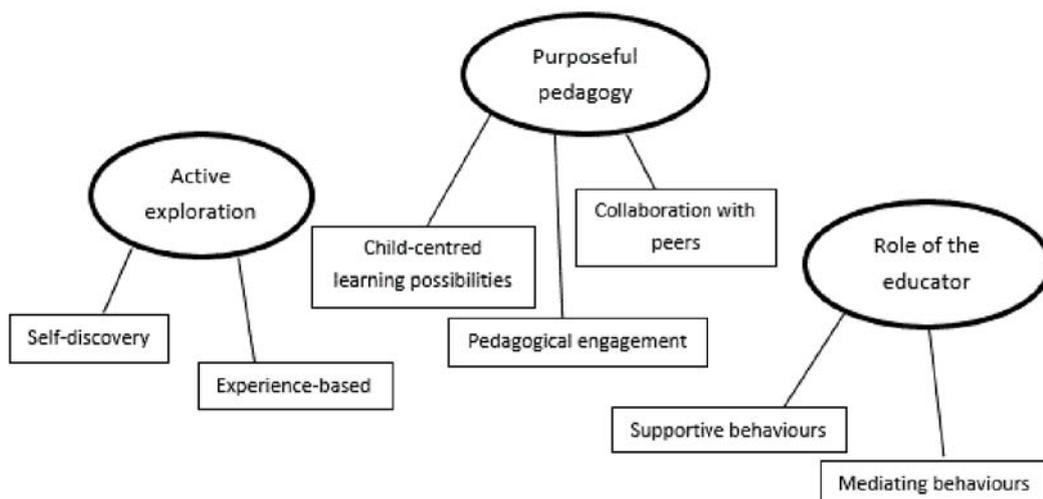
Figure 3.4   Emerging thematic map for Research Question 1 (prior-to-school educators)

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.