Marino Institute of Education

Educators' Perspectives of the Processes of Communication between Preschool and

Primary School Sectors

Thesis by

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly. This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institution. The work was done under the guidance of Leah O'Toole at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

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Abstract

The interest in transition has grown over the past decade, in both national and international literature (CECDE, 2006a; Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; O'Kane, 2016; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006, 2010; Ring et al., 2016). The quality of communication between the professionals who work in either sector can have an effect on the success of a child's transition (Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; O'Kane, 2016; Ring et al., 2016). Although there is a wealth of research on the importance of communication and transferring documentation there is less formal guidance on what information should be transferred and how (ETC Research Group, 2011 cited by O'Kane, 2016).This research aims to answer the question: What are educators' perceptions of the processes of communication between the preschool and primary school sectors at the time of transition, including facilitators, barriers and strategies to improve communication? The sample was six primary school teachers and six preschool teachers, in Ireland. A qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews, was chosen as the research method. It was viewed as the most appropriate design for the data desired (Merriam, 2009) as the aim was to collect individual perspectives on the topic. The data analysis showed general cohesion on the importance of transition and professional communication while showing some difference in opinion amongst the participants of the barriers, facilitators and strategies for communication. While the findings show that there are communication strategies that can be adopted with some effort and time devoted to them, many things would have to change at policy level to encourage a coordinated system of communication.

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Abbreviations

ATECI	Association of Teachers' Education Centres in Ireland
CCC's	City and County Childcare Committees
CCS	Community Childcare Subvention Scheme
CCSP	Community Childcare Subvention Private Scheme
CCSU	Community Childcare Subvention Universal Scheme
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CPD	Continual Professional Development
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECCE	Early Childhood Education and Care Scheme, also known as FPSY
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECI	Early Childhood Ireland
EPPSE	Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education
ETC Research Group	Educational, Transitions and Change Research Group
EYEI	Early Years Education-focused Inspection

FPSY	Free Preschool Year (also known as ECCE scheme)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GSCE	State exams in the UK
HSE	Health Service Executive
MERC	Marino Ethics in Research Committee
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
POBAL	Pobal acts as an intermediary for programmes funded by the Irish Government and the EU.
TEC	Training and Employment Childcare Scheme
TUSLA	The Child and Family Agency
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Introduction

The topic of transition has become of great interest to researchers and academics in Ireland and around the world (CECDE, 2006b; Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; O'Kane, 2007, 2013, 2016; O'Kane & Murphy, 2016b; Ring et al., 2016). Increasing emphasis has been placed on the importance of this time in children's lives over the past 10 years, and while there is a body of literature explaining transition, we still know little about the processes of communication. The aim of this research is to answer the research question: What are educators' perceptions of the processes of communication between preschool and primary school sectors at the time of transition, including factors that may promote or limit communication and strategies to encourage communication and collaboration? Chapter one will give an account of the most recent literature on the importance of transition, the importance of communication between preschool and primary school sectors, macro-level influences on communication and micro-level influences on communication. Chapter two outlines the methodology used in the research and includes ethical considerations, research design, research instrument, sampling strategy, data analysis and limitations of the research. Chapter three presents an analysis of the research findings and literature that supports or contradicts them. Chapter four concludes the findings and provides recommendations for creating processes of communication between professionals to facilitate children's transitions. From here "transition" will be referring to the transition from preschool to primary school, unless otherwise stated.

Chapter One - Literature Review

This chapter aims to give an account of predominant themes within literature on transition and how they affect cross-sectoral communication. The importance of transition and the importance of communication will be introduced first. Followed by both the macro-level and micro-level influences on communication, explaining how they may facilitate, limit or improve communication.

The Importance of Transition

The literature around transitions has increased over the last decade. This may be due to the greater understanding of how important transition is and the view that successful transition at this time can support transitions in later life (CECDE, 2006c; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; Margetts, 2007). Hopps and Dockett (2011), advocate the importance of transition by describing it as a "significant period of change" (p.1). Although transition is experienced by all children it is "an individual process and needs to be personalised" (Fabian, 2013, p. 52). O'Kane (2015) describes the move from the Early Childhood Education (ECE) setting as being "one of the most important transitions that young children experience" (p. 3). O'Kane (2013) points out the need for investment of time and money into transitions stating:

> If children of Ireland are to benefit from the past investment made into ECE and capitalise on it a primary school level, there is a clear need to work towards stronger supports as they make the transition from one educational environment to another
> (p. 16–17).

A successful transition can result in children having positive attitudes towards school and learning and these positive attitudes can be a protective factor against educational disadvantage and promote resilience in those children (Hayes, O'Toole, &

Halpenny, 2017). Some studies have shown that if children are supported appropriately at this time there is a reduction in academic failure and higher levels of self-esteem, self-control and social skills (O'Kane & Hayes, 2010) to the benefit of their future schooling (Margetts, 2007). Achieving a smooth transition will ensure that children will feel secure, relaxed and comfortable in the new environment. Feeling "suitable" for school is crucial for their learning, development and sense of well-being and belonging (Brostrom, 2002, p. 52). However, in some cases transition can be difficult, the effects of which may indicate its' importance.

The importance of transition success.

Transition can cause difficulties to even the most confident and competent learner. It can be crucial to children's outcomes in terms of social and emotional development and has long term ramifications for future educational achievements (Hayes et al., 2017; Margetts, 2002). While acknowledging the vast amount of literature that supports the need for successful transition and its benefits; there are challenges for educators when it comes to ensuring it as a smooth process. Understanding expectations of all the stakeholders can be difficult; parents, children and educators from both sectors can have differing expectations of both settings and children during transition (O'Kane, 2007). Negotiating these differences as well as understanding social-emotional wellbeing of children and ensuring curriculum continuity between settings can be extremely difficult (Fabian, 2013). It has been reported, by experiencing difficulty at this time children can become disengaged with the educational system (O'Kane & Hayes, 2006). Children who struggle more at this time of transition can see the gap between themselves and their peers widen over time (O'Kane & Hayes, 2010).

The importance of preschool.

To overcome some challenges and to ensure success at primary level, the literature suggests attending preschool has an important role to play. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2012, p. 26) refers to early childhood programmes as having an "intentional education component." It states that they aim to develop socio-emotional skills necessary for participation in school and society while also developing some of the skills needed for academic readiness and to prepare for entry into primary education. The importance of preschool in terms of later academic success is outlined in the latest report of the Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE, formally EPPE) Project where children's educational outcomes at the age of 16 were examined (Sylva et al., 2014). It was found that children who attended preschool, predicted higher GCSE's (UK state exams). Spending two to three years in preschool resulted in higher GCSE's compared to those who attended for one year. The quality of preschool also predicted greater success and more important for children experiencing disadvantage (Sylva et al., 2014). These findings aim to illustrate the importance of preschool and lasting effects on education.

In Ireland there are similar findings from Ring et al. (2016). When it was originally introduced in 2010, the free preschool year (FPSY), was one year of free early childhood education accessible to all children before entering primary school. This has now been increased to two years. The objective of the FPSY is to ensure every child experiences early learning in a formal setting in the year before primary school (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), 2014). Ring et al. (2016) examined preschool teachers', preschool managers', primary teachers', principals' and

parents' perceptions of the benefits of the FPSY on children's readiness for school. The participants identified a range of benefits of FPSY and felt it helped in social development, developing independence and developing numeracy and literacy skills. The majority of participants agreed that the FPSY played a substantial role in the preparation of children for primary school. The participants also discussed how the increased attendance in the FPSY meant an increase in readiness and gave them a good start on their educational journey (Ring et al., 2016). Other ideas of ensuring successful transition detailed in the literature is older school starting age and development of skills and dispositions needed for school (O'Kane, 2016; Ring et al., 2016). In order for the benefits of the preschool experience to transfer to primary, communication between both professionals is extremely important (Brostrom, 2002; CECDE, 2006c; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; O'Kane, 2016; Ring et al., 2016).

The Importance of Cross-Sectoral Communication

Many authors support the idea of inter-setting communication at the time of transition and its potential to enhance it (CECDE, 2006b; Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; O'Kane, 2016). Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006a) supports the need for communication and recommends that in order to fully implement the quality standard, children's transition should be supported through "making connections with other relevant settings, school, organisations or individuals" (CECDE, 2006c, p. 6). Neuman (2002) supports the importance of communication by stating that smooth transitions depend on the development of relationships between school, preschools and families. Dunlop (2013) echoes this idea by explaining "teacher collaboration across sectors" along with "parental participation, children's voice and agency and sharing information on

curriculum and social experiences" are most important factors contributing to successful transition (p. 139).

Hayes et al. (2017) too are of the opinion that adults' relationships with each other can be crucial to ensuring a smooth transition for children and state "ensuring strong communication between the preschool and primary school regarding both curriculum and educational approaches as well as the needs of individual children" (p. 76). Hopps (2014) describes how teachers can gather authentic information and prior knowledge about children through communication. It can encourage preschool teachers and primary school teachers to collaboratively develop transitions programmes together as well as encouraging positive relationships which foster respect (Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011). These positive relationships are seen as vital for transitions (Hopps & Dockett, 2011). However Brostrom (2002) warns that in order for communication and collaboration to be successful, all stakeholders must value its importance and be committed to developing it on an on-going basis. The outcomes of communication may then have a positive effect on children and the way in which they cope for the move to primary school. O'Kane and Hayes (2010) emphasised encouraging communication and continuity between all stakeholders within transition and make the important point that partnership between the two sectors will need to be developed while having respect for the differences of both sectors.

While there is a shift in both literature and policy on transitions to the importance of communication (CECDE, 2006a; Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; NCCA, 2018; O'Kane, 2016), whether or not it is happening currently is important to consider. O'Kane's (2016) report identified that there was a case for "greater communication and coordination between all stakeholders." Some communication is

happening in local areas in Ireland and O'Kane and Murphy (2016b) give an account of the communication happening through the transferring of documentation. However, very little is happening in any sort of a coordinated way (O'Kane, 2016). Reiterating this, O'Toole (2016) too acknowledges the wealth of literature supporting the need for greater communication and explains communication between both sectors has been minimal and non-existent in some cases.

O'Kane (2007) found that both preschool and primary teachers reported few instances of communication between sectors and little similarity in approaches to learning (O'Kane, 2013). Both sectors had little understanding of each other's pedagogical strategies or working environments, but did express a willingness to engage in some form of increased communication (O'Kane, 2007). It seems that this situation has not improved in recent years as Ring et al, (2016) reports similar findings where there was a lack of coordinated communication. This absence of communication is very worrying for children's transition, especially for those who may be at-risk through experiencing poverty, having an additional need or English as a second language (Brostrom, 2002). Although the support for transition is established, few research studies have investigated preschool-school communication in depth (Hopps, 2014). Human processes like the experiences of preschool teachers and primary school teachers with regards to communication must be located within the contexts in which they occur both locally and at national or international level (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Therefore, it may be useful to consider macro-level and micro-level influences on communication.

EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE PROCESSES OF COMMUNICATION

Macro-Level Influences on Communication

The macro-level influences on cross-sectoral communication in Ireland are complex and plentiful. Policy development and initiatives in the area, curriculum continuity and recognition of the preschool sector all play some role in cross-sectoral communication. Differing educational contexts, time and workload afforded to teachers, data protection and shared continual professional development (CPD) may also influence cross-sectoral communication. These influences along with the supporting literature will be considered in terms of their role in the facilitation, limitation or improvement of cross-sectoral communication.

The role of national policy in transition and communication.

Transition has gained increasing recognition over the years at policy level. In 1971 the Pupil Transfer committee was established and published a report in 1981. The White Paper "Charting our Education Future," which had a focus on transition, from home to school (not from preschool to school), was published in 1995 and in 2009 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was tasked with advising the Minister for Education on transition policy (O'Toole, 2016). While there is no transition policy at present in Ireland, this also seems to be the case in many other countries. O'Kane and Murphy's (2016a) audit of fourteen policy jurisdictions found that none had national policy in place. Albeit, there is a continuing focus on transition in Ireland at present and developing transition is part of the NCCA's current strategic plan (O'Kane, 2016; O'Toole, 2016). Although intentions to create change in terms of educational policy are present, Margetts and Kienig (2013b) acknowledge that "change at policy level is complex" and can be complicated since policy change is "sometimes with the interests of children, families and educational institutions at heart, and other

times driven or compromised by issues of accountability for fiscal constraints" (p. 152).

Within research and policy on transition there now seems to be a shift in focus towards the importance of communication and collaboration between preschool and primary sectors (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016b). Although there is a wealth of research on the importance of communication and transferring documentation there is less formal guidance on what information should be transferred and how (ETC Research Group, 2011., cited by O'Kane, 2016). The absence of policy and guidance is one of the factors that is limiting communication currently (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a). Greater guidance on communication and collaboration at national level could possibly filter down to the schools and preschools and act as a facilitator for both sectors to communicate (O'Kane, 2015). Policy and procedural documentation has the potential as a strategy to bring together both sectors and encourage continuity of learning experiences for all children (Fabian, 2013). However, Brostrom (2002) warns that while there are excellent, workable ideas to develop communication and collaboration, nothing may be achieved without resources being added to both sectors. Resources supplied by the Irish government has been in the form of research (O'Kane, 2016; O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a, 2016b) and initiatives (CECDE, 2006a; NCCA, 2009, 2018). An example of such an initiative is the NCCA's pilot transitions project (NCCA, 2018).

In a review of transfer documentation in Ireland, O'Kane and Murphy (2016b) explain that the NCCA are responsible for developing nationally agreed templates for sharing information. Both the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) plan to make the completion of such reports a requirement for preschool settings (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016b) and there

has been some developments in this area. The NCCA (2018) piloted a transitions initiative that involved all stakeholders, shared CPD for both groups of professionals, the use of sharing information templates, joint meetings with professionals and parents and preschool/school visits. The templates developed demonstrated children's individual achievements and not only supports the child may need. The findings of the initiative were extremely positive. Both sets of professionals found it worthwhile, but consistently said that it was not just because of using the templates but rather the whole initiative. While the templates were easy to use, they were extremely time-consuming and often done on unpaid, personal time. Preschool professionals felt that going forward there would need to be paid non-contact time if it was rolled out nationally. While the development of these templates will benefit children they may also be crucial in the development of relationships between preschool and primary school teachers (O'Kane, 2016).

Both Siolta (CECDE, 2006a) and, in particular, Aistear (NCCA, 2009), when they were introduced, were also seen to have the possibility to bring about the alignment of both sectors by developing cross-sectoral links (O'Kane, 2013, 2015). Curriculum Frameworks, in particular, have the potential to bridge the gap in linking the sectors closer together (Dunlop, 2007).

The role of curriculum continuity in transition and communication.

Curriculum has a "powerful influence" on what happens in preschool and primary school settings and the system a curriculum is in can dictate how it is put into action (Dunlop, 2013, p. 136). In other words, although curriculum has specific learning content to follow, how it is enacted can depend on the culture and social context of each individual school/preschool. Curriculum continuity can be achieved by avoiding times

where there are huge differences in learning approaches for children. Building on what they already know in a supportive environment is essential and continuing the play-based approach will enable children to continue their learning without significant upheaval or change (Fabian, 2013). Developing positive and supportive relationships between the two sectors is critical to ensuring continuity (O'Kane, 2015). However, it can be difficult for professionals working within each sector to fully understand the respective curriculum expectations of the other, possibly inhibiting using curriculum to develop relationships (Brostrom, 2002). Continuity between teachers can act as a facilitator for communication as when it is present professionals are more likely to feel connected (Dunlop, 2013).

In Ireland, when moving from preschool to primary there can be a change in curriculum from the play-based, child-focused approach, which allows for more flexibility and freedom (O'Kane & Hayes, 2010) to the more formal teacher-directed primary curriculum (Gray & Ryan, 2016). While many primary school teachers are using Aistear to support teaching and learning in the first years of primary school (O'Kane, 2016), when Aistear is not being used, children are sometimes expected to sit and listen to instruction, act upon them, wait their turn, work in cooperation with others and adhere to rules (O'Kane & Hayes, 2010). This can present difficulties for children during their transition and is often cited as a cause for concern (O'Toole, 2016) as children who's cultural environments are similar, deal better with the beginning of primary school (Kienig, 2013). Dunlop (2013) explains the importance of ensuring continuity by stating when the two sectors are "coupled systems" the challenges that children face are more manageable for them. How the school/preschool operates may dictate how difficult children find transition (Dunlop, 2013). Researchers have called

for more formal policies and processes to ensure continuity of learning between the educational settings (O'Kane, 2015) as a strategy to improve communication and work on developing curriculum continuity is beginning.

The NCCA (2016) are examining the structure of the primary curriculum in an effort to address discontinuity. They have begun consultation on a proposed new structure and time allocation for the primary curriculum. Within the consultation, they acknowledge that the current primary curriculum (Department of Education and Science, 1999) was informed by the research available at the time. While curriculum evaluations and research, since its introduction, have highlighted strengths of the curriculum they have also highlighted its challenges (NCCA, 2016). More recent curriculum research would point to a more integrated approach, especially for children in the early years of primary school (NCCA, 2016). In the document the NCCA outline two options for the re-structuring which are underpinned by the idea that continuity between preschool, primary and post-primary sectors is essential and that subject-based learning is no longer appropriate for the early years of primary school but rather a deeper understanding on certain topics with a subject-based structure being more appropriate for older children (NCCA, 2016).

The consultation document (NCCA, 2016) outlined two options. Option one has three phases. The first phase for children from 3-6/7 years, includes preschool to infant classes and the curriculum used is Aistear. This change is to ensure continuity, prioritise playful learning and place an importance on child-led play. The second phase consists of 1st to 4th class (6/7-10/11-year olds) and would be focused on curriculum areas rather than subjects. This is said to enable children to deepen their knowledge and supports connection between the two other phases. The last phase would apply to children in 5th

and 6th class (10-12/13-year olds) and would be mainly based on subjects to extend

problem solving and higher order thinking skills. Option 2 consists of two phases: phase

one incorporates children from preschool to 2nd class (3- 8/9 years) and would operate

Aistear ensuring continuity through the six years of schooling. The second phase

consists of children from 3rd class to 6th class (8-12/13-year olds) and would be subject-

based to bridge curriculum used in post primary school.

The introduction of Aistear for the infant classes as well as the preschool years

is seen as a positive one as although Aistear (NCCA, 2009) was supposed to help bridge

the two sectors, in reality, learning through play doesn't yet have the status envisaged in

primary schools (Gray & Ryan, 2016). Despite the abundance of national and

international literature supporting the use of a play-based approach in the infant classes,

play remains with peripheral status in the classroom (Gray & Ryan, 2016). Gray and

Ryan found it was used for settling-in time at the beginning of the day, was generally

adult-led and passive table-top activities were featured frequently. They also found that

teachers used this time to complete administrative tasks for the "real" work. It seemed

that Aistear and the PSC were mutually exclusive. Aistear was launched at a time of

austerity in Ireland, and the preschool sector have been engaging with Aistear on a

voluntary basis with no support or national training plan (O'Kane, 2016). It is a similar

situation for the primary sector (Ring et al., 2016) as CPD available is voluntary. The

economic state of the country is changing and for the full implementation Aistear there

needs to be support at national level. As cited in Gray and Ryan (2016, p. 203),

O'Connor and Angus (2011) put it simply:

> Rather than task teachers with implementing two vastly different forms of
> curriculum. If Ireland, as a nation, chooses the formalised, classroom-based,
> high child–adult ratio structures of its primary sector for its four- and five-year-

olds, then the very least it should do is formally adopt Aistear, train teachers in it fully and use it to replace the 1999 curriculum rather than have the two attempt to co-exist when there are such evident compatibility issues.

The NCCA consultation document outlined that while there is general positivity around the redevelopment of the Primary Curriculum, there are some concerns highlighted too. There was consensus that linking preschool and infant classes was a good idea regardless of whether it is was in a two phase or three phase format (NCCA, 2016). It was felt that the linking was important for transition, developing continuity of learning and encouraging connection and communication, however, challenges accessing resources and CPD were expressed (NCCA, 2016). There was greater support for the three phase model which is viewed as "a natural and progressive continuum of education" (p. 76) compared to the two phase approach which could push the sudden jolt of discontinuity currently experienced by children transitioning from preschool to primary school to children transitioning from 2nd class to 3rd class (NCCA, 2016). The restructuring of the primary curriculum is in its early stages and while there are different types of issues logistically and philosophically it is still a welcomed development. The prospect of the full implementation of a curriculum framework is seen positively ensuring curriculum continuity and may possibly, promote communication and collaboration amongst the two sectors (Dunlop, 2007). However, concerns for the linkage centred on the extremely different contexts of preschool and primary school in terms of pupil to teacher ratio, minimum qualifications, terms and conditions of employment in each sector and how integration would work considering these (NCCA, 2016). The differences in the terms and conditions of employment between preschool and primary school sector are vast (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017), exploring these, through discussion will add to the macro-level context of what may affect communication between preschool and primary school teachers.

The role of the recognition of the preschool sector in transition and communication.

In 2017, the Houses of the Oireachtas published a report to draw attention to the poor working conditions, below average pay scales and major difficulties facing the preschool sector (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). The report was developed in consultation with preschool professionals, advocacy groups and representatives from the city and county childcare committees (CCC's). It outlined the need for the government to publish an early years strategy to set a plan for the development of the early years education and care sector. It also gave weight to the idea that the working conditions and pay scales in the sector are "starkly deficient" (2017, p. 12). It is explicit throughout the report there is lack of recognition and value placed on the preschool sector, by the government, through chronic under funding (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017) . In 2013 the Irish government spent .1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on early childhood education and care, that is .7% lower that the European average of .8% and .9% lower than the UNICEF recommendation of 1% (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). In comparison, in 2014, the government spent 4.8% of GDP on education (DES, 2017).

The pay in the early childhood education and care sector is significantly less than the pay in the primary sector. The average rate per hour in the early childhood education and care sector is €10.92, compared to €33.90 in the primary sector (ECI, 2016). The first point on the salary scale for a primary school teacher is €35,958 (INTO, 2018) whereas even if working for forty hours per week, fifty-two weeks of the year a preschool teacher could only earn €22,838 (based on a rate of €10.92 per hour) (ECI, 2016). Moloney and Pope (2013) found that this remuneration affected graduates'

confidence and self-esteem in relation to their work, which may limit how comfortable they feel to communicate. As a result of poor pay and the precarious working conditions created by the funding schemes of the government, 57% of professionals cited pay as the reason for leaving the sector (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017).

The report consistently outlines the need for the improvement of working conditions and pay and the introduction of paid non-contact time training, all of which are present in the primary sector as a strategy to improve communication. The current running and funding of the sector ensures that staff "lack professional rights of their own" (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017, p. 27). It suggests for a plan to be developed to introduce working terms and conditions on a par with the rest of the education system including a nationally agreed pay scale and paid non-contact time (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). It gives recommendations to be implemented to align the sector closer to that of the primary education sector. When the same value is placed on both communication may be easier to foster. While the largest difference can be seen in terms of curriculum and pedagogical continuity and recognition of the preschool sector, there are other differences that may affect communication between professionals.

Educational context – differences between preschool and primary school.

The differences in contexts can be seen in Ireland from bottom level to policy level. It ranges from differing government departments governing and funding each sector and different regulatory and inspecting bodies for each sector; down to curricular, staff training and qualification differences (O'Toole, 2016). Many difficulties children experience in transition are contextually based (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Both sectors, in Ireland, have developed independently of each other (O'Kane & Hayes, 2006) and differ in nearly "every aspect of operation" (O'Kane, 2013, p. 14).

The difference in educational contexts can mean changes in care routines for children, the level of parent-school communication, behaviour management strategies with the use of extrinsic reward systems and supervision and safety (Dockett & Perry, 2007). While differing contexts are difficult for children to adapt to, having such differences between two sectors may also limit the level and type of communication and collaboration or prohibit it completely (Neuman, 2002). The differences in contexts may result in a lack of common goals and understanding of each other's role (Brostrom, 2002; Fabian, 2013) and in turn have the potential to limit communication. As a result of this lack of understanding Brostrom (2002) reports that preschool teachers can view school in a negative way thinking that the children are required to sit down all day, sit still all the time and that learning is done through laborious tasks. Likewise, primary school teachers may think preschool was more about care than education. These assumptions could lead to an unwillingness of both sides to engage in communication.

The preschool sector is governed and funded by the DCYA and inspected by various organisations, also under the auspices of DCYA, including TUSLA - The Child and Family Agency, POBAL, and the HSE Environmental Health Section. The primary sector is governed, funded and inspected by the DES. Neuman (2002) outlines that in other countries there is a similar situation. Where sectors are under the same administration i.e. same government departments, shared agendas of work are more likely (Dunlop, 2013). This could mean it would be more likely for preschools and schools to communicate and collaborate and have shared views on curriculum if they were governed by the same organisation.

Professionals train in different pre-service and in-service training programmes and these programmes have varying content. CPD within primary schools in Ireland is

conducted within school hours in the form of in-service days or in the summer time where teachers are rewarded extra days leave (course days) in recognition of engaging in CPD. An example of this is would be the Aistear Tutor Initiative (Walsh, McMillan, & Doherty, 2013). The Aistear Tutor Initiative is run in partnership by the NCCA and the (ATECI). Since April 2010 the Aistear Tutor Initiative has supported over 10,000 primary school teachers and principals to develop practice in infant classrooms using Aistear. This is done through workshops and summer courses. The initiative has resulted in an increase in child-led, play-based learning in infant classroom (O'Kane, 2016). In contrast, within the preschool sector all CPD (including mandatory training e.g. first aid, child protection, manual handling and fire safety) is carried out in out-of-work hours and is unpaid (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). O'Kane (2016) points out there is no national level training plan to support the implementation of Aistear and preschool settings have been implementing the framework on a voluntary basis.

While there is stark difference between preschool and primary school, there are attempts to align the two sectors by the DES with the introduction of the Early-years Education-Focused Inspection (EYEI). The inspectorate of the department has the responsibility for evaluating the quality of education provision in early years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program. The aim of the inspection is to improve quality to ensure there are processes in place for continuity of experiences between the two sectors. The inspection is a collaborative process involving the inspector, the preschool team and evaluates the nature, range and appropriateness of experiences provided. It is based around a quality framework informed by Aistear and Siolta as well as national and international research concerning early education and inspection (DES, 2016). While national initiatives are welcomed

the level of non-contact time and a realistic workload of preschool and primary school teachers is important to consider.

Time and workload at macro-level.

Transition activities in general can be extremely time-consuming. A lack of time and resources experienced in both sectors will inevitably act as a barrier to preschools' and primary schools' ability to develop rich, worthwhile communication and collaboration (Brostrom, 2002). In 2017, a non-contact payment was announced by the DCYA and is paid to all preschool services operating the subsidised schemes, ECCE, (also known as FPSY), Community Childcare Subvention (CCS), Community Childcare Subvention Private (CCSP), Community Childcare Subvention Universal (CCSU) and Training and Education Childcare (TEC), and is calculated based on the number of children availing of those schemes. It is in recognition for the time it takes to provide good quality early childhood education and administration time (Lyons, 2017). Primary teachers spend most of their working day teaching and while they do get some non-contact time it is not an official term or condition of their contract but rather a choice by individual teachers to ensure they are fulfilling curricular demands (Gray & Ryan, 2016).

Confidentiality and data protection.

O'Kane and Murphy (2016a) point out that for communication between the two sectors and for sharing information in particular, data protection could be an issue for preschool and primary teachers, possibly limiting communication; and for the formation of national policies. In Australia, privacy legislation is cited as a barrier to the transferring of information while in New Zealand preschools overcome this by making

parental consent a pre-requisite of the completion on the transfer documentation (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a).

In Ireland however, the transferring of information concerning a child's educational achievements who is moving between "recognised" (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a, p. 36) schools is allowed without the teacher breaching data protection law. This is the case for the transfer of information from primary to post primary, but this is less clear for the transfer from pre-primary to primary. While confidentiality and data protection, an operational barrier, is important, data protection law may get in the way of communication. The introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the European Union imposed regulation that aims to protect the data of anyone in the EU on the 25th of May 2018 could make communication and transferring of information even more difficult.

Macro-level strategies.

Curriculum continuity has been acknowledged as a change needed in order to bring the sectors together (NCCA, 2016) along with the need to value the preschool sector in the same way as the primary school sector (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017) and the formation of national policy (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a). The introduction of shared CPD opportunities and their possible effect on the development of communication has been identified through an initiative in Ballyfermot, Dublin which will be discussed below (Walsh et al., 2013).

Shared continual professional development (CPD).

Ongoing professional development and reflection, where professionals are given support and resources to provide the best environment for children, and where joint

educational experiences for professionals take place, communication can be enhanced and will in turn create greater cohesion of the two sectors (O'Kane, 2015). Shared pre-service and in-service training can offer the opportunity for professionals from different fields to learn from each other and reflect on their own practice. It can encourage them to work together and achieve core common knowledge while developing partnerships (Neuman, 2002). Combined professional development opportunities provide a space to support communication and this improved communication would be a useful action in enhancing transitions (Peters, 2002).

An example of this is the Ballyfermot Aistear Training project (Walsh et al., 2013). One of its aims was to evaluate the impact of a cross-sector approach to CPD in Aistear for preschool and primary professionals. The evaluation focused on both the perspective of the professionals themselves and from the perspective of the implementation of Aistear in the settings. Shared CPD on Aistear was provided to a group of professionals for a period of six weeks and were 2 hours in length per session. Some of the topics covered in the training included: Transitions, becoming familiar with the Aistear curriculum framework, play as a context for learning, the role of the adult in supporting creativity, documenting and sharing children's learning, challenging and supporting play and approaches to assessment.

Participants appeared to enjoy the training and identified there was some development of relationships and mutual respect. Although these views seemed positive, the analysis of the qualitative data showed this was not the case for every participant. Some participants had concerns around the contexts of each educational setting being too different for the shared training, some felt it was geared more towards early childhood professionals, while others thought it was more teacher focused. Some

early childhood professionals also felt there was a lack of communication and

relationship building and they felt undervalued or less important as a result.

Interestingly, a suggestion from one of participants, to address individual, natural bias

may be a solution to eliminating these concerns. The recommendations from the

research were to continue providing shared professional development experiences that

attract professionals from both sectors but that provide more opportunity for intra-sector

and cross sector mixing. When changes like these are made at policy level the

implementation of strategies at micro-level may be easier (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a).

The macro-level influences and their possible effect on communication have been

detailed above, it is now appropriate to look at the micro-level influences and how they

may facilitate, limit or improve communication.

Micro-Level Influences on Communication

This section will give an account of the micro-level influences that affect

communication between professionals. The school readiness debate, specifically, school

starting age and skills and dispositions deemed essential for the beginning of primary

school, the co-location of preschools and primary schools and the possible effect on

communication will be presented. Time and workload at micro-level, sharing

information processes, joint teacher meetings and preschool/school visits and their

possible influences on communication will also be discussed.

Expectations of school readiness.

Ring et al. (2016) found that for their participants "school readiness" was a

complex idea with multiple connotations. The idea of children's school readiness can be

a topic filled with tension. Age along with whether children have developed the

necessary skills to progress into primary school are cited as indicators of school readiness throughout the literature.

School starting age.

School Starting age is seen as a predictor for success in transition (Ring et al., 2016) and being older starting school can be a predictor of later academic success (Whitebread, 2013). In Ireland, Ring et al. (2016) examined professionals views on the appropriate school starting age for children and found a difference of opinion between both professionals. The primary participants generally approved of the current situation with school starting age in Ireland, but found their opinion was influenced by the customs and long-standing practice in the primary sector. Many primary participants were in favour of a school starting age of four and a half to five years, while less were in favour of school starting age between five and five and a half years with a small minority in favour of a school starting age of four and four and a half years. Preschool participants were less likely to favour the current situation with half of the participants favouring five to five and a half as the optimal age to go to school. These participants were more open to the idea of change and possibly aligning Ireland with the older school going age of six that is seen in Europe. While there is a focus on optimal school going age, there tends to be a significant amount of emphasis placed on which skills or dispositions may be needed for transition also.

Skills needed for primary school.

O'Kane (2007) found that the beliefs, expectations and classroom practices of both preschool and primary teachers have a great impact on transition (O'Kane, 2013). The dispositions, skills and competencies have long been debated in the literature on

transition (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002; O'Kane, 2007, 2013; O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a; Peters, 2002; Ring et al., 2016). Differences in opinion have been found in some studies (Peters, 2002; Ring et al., 2016) and cohesion in others (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002; O'Kane, 2007). Ring et al. (2016) found some disparity amongst participants in their study. While preschool participants mentioned the importance of focusing on the whole child they also put great emphasis on pre-academic skills. In contrast, the primary participants viewed social and emotional development, language and self-help skills as most important when going to primary school. However, O'Kane (2007) found that the perceptions of the skills needed for primary school were the same amongst both professionals. In Peters (2002) study parents and teachers (both preschool and school) found that the skills reported by teachers to be important for transition to school were similar in both sectors. Independence in learning, practical skills, ability to listen, sit still and take turns were all cited as being essential.

Brostrom (2002) points out how essential it is for professionals to have a shared understanding of the skills an competencies for children's success in the first year of primary school. Dunlop and Fabian (2002) acknowledge some form of cohesion amongst teachers in terms of the words used to describe transition they fear that the language is "not a mutual one" (p. 146). For example, Independence is often cited as an essential skill needed for the beginning of primary school however the meaning understood by a primary teacher and a preschool teacher can be very different. In primary school, independence can mean being able to attend to a task without much support from the teacher while in preschool it can mean being able to choose their own activities and how they would like to play (Brooker, 2008).

In order for the two professionals to work together on transition there needs to be mutual clarification of expectations, understanding of meanings and greater levels of communication and consistency between the two sectors and differences in opinions may limit communication (O'Kane, 2013). Although some research shows cohesion between the two sectors on this point, which could be the basis of a strong relationship it is worthwhile to note that the understanding of skills children need for the transition to school have moved on from these ideas somewhat and these views of school readiness whether they are agreed upon or not, are based on both chronological age and effects of the environment. However, an alternative view is emerging from the literature.

A new way of thinking about school readiness.

It is clear to see from the literature that the topic of school readiness is complex. To explain its complexity Ring et al cites Dockett and Perry's (2002) categorisation of the views of readiness for school:

- Maturationist view: focuses mainly on chronological age

- Environmental view: focuses on the development of specific skills deemed essential for starting school

- Social constructivist view: locates readiness in the child social and cultural contexts and therefore influence their readiness

- Interactionist view: regards readiness in a broader way and that the child's characteristics along with a range of influences in the child's environment as dictating readiness.

Ring et al. (2016) participants aligned themselves with the maturationist-environmental view of school readiness. This meant they viewed readiness as a combination of age and whether children have developed the necessary skills needed for primary school. However, the interactionist view is becoming more respected amongst the literature (Child Trends, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Ring et al., 2016). The interactionist view is a shift in thinking from the adults' responsibility of preparing children for school to the child's responsibility to demonstrate readiness for school and that the skills that children develop are just one aspect of a broader context of preparedness for school (O'Kane, 2016).

With all of this in mind, Dockett and Perry (2007) ask the question why is it the children who need to change and develop for the school why is it not the schools and teachers adapting to the children? Professionals should recognise the importance of ready children while recognising the need to become ready schools (O'Kane, 2016), meaning that schools need to be ready for the children just as much as the children need to be ready for the school (Dunlop, 2013; Hámori, 2007). Ring et al. (2016) emphasis this alternative idea of "ready schools," reflective of the interactionist view of school readiness. Child Trends (2001) outline the characteristics of ready schools;

- there is importance on transition from home to school and support parents with transition.
- They strive for continuity and ensure high quality instruction and appropriate pacing of learning.
- Sensitivity to individual child needs is important and the assessment are used to plan for those needs.

- Teachers are supported in developing professional skills and are led by strong leaders.

- Strategies are in place for children who struggle, parental involvement is encouraged in those cases and strategies are revised of they are not working.

They can achieve this by ensuring that they take each child's perspective, needs and interests into account (Brostrom, 2002). The introduction of Aistear into the infant classroom may help towards developing primary schools into ready schools (O'Kane, 2016). The debate around school readiness has been long standing, differing perspectives add to the difficulties in fostering communication and collaboration (O'Kane, 2013). The co-location of preschools and primary schools, a micro-level influence on communication has the potential to ease the difficulties presented here.

Co-located preschools and early start settings.

The location of a preschool setting can be important and a co-located preschool may be of benefit to transition (Hassett, 2014). The majority of preschools are either run privately or by community organisations (ECI, 2016) but some preschools are located on school grounds. Hassett (2014) found that the co-location of the settings enabled a familiarity with the primary environment and facilitated communication about children. An example of this is the Early Start programme. While the Early Start programme is an early education programme funded and run by the DES and located on school grounds in areas of disadvantage. They are targeted towards specific socioeconomic groups and is free of charge. The children are educated by a primary teacher and a childcare assistant (DES, 2014). One of the objectives of the programme is to promote communication between Early Start and other teachers and states that it should

"integrate within-school services" (Educational Research Centre, 1998). The DES (2014), in a review of the project, found that parents felt Early Start eased transition to primary because of the location. While this is related to transitions in general, if co-location makes it easier for children and parents it may make it easier for professionals from both sectors to communicate. However, if professionals' workload and non-contact time is insufficient at micro-level there is very little potential for communication regardless of location of preschools and schools.

Time and workload at micro-level.

While the need for communication amongst professionals of both sectors is widely acknowledged by teachers themselves and the literature (CECDE, 2006b; Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; Neuman, 2002; Peters, 2002), Peters (2002) found that in a busy urban environment the amount of schools preschools would need to communicate with and the amount of preschools schools need to communicate with was overwhelming and could act as a barrier to communication and collaboration, this coupled with the lack of non-contact time may present difficulties for communication. In Ireland, this too could be applied as children go from several preschools within the area of the school and vice versa. Trying to link with and sustain relationships with each of the schools/preschools could prove challenging. Strategies to improve communication are also cited in the literature.

Micro-level strategies.

Micro-level strategies are those that can be implemented through a change in preschool or school policy and procedures. However, it is essential to consider previous discussion that the changes mentioned at macro-level need to be introduced first.

Sharing information processes.

A lot of the literature focuses on the development of report forms (NCCA, 2018; O'Kane, 2016; O'Kane & Murphy, 2016b) and while they do have their merits especially those outlined in the NCCA initiative, Peters, Hartley, Rogers, Smith and Carr (2009) advocate the use of learning portfolios to transfer appropriate information rather than a report form. In New Zealand many early childhood settings use learning portfolios as transfer documents. Learning portfolios include learning stories of children's development that include observations and examples of their work and highlight the child as a competent and capable learner (O'Kane, 2016).

The learning portfolio presents the child as a competent learner and clearly illustrates the skills and dispositions they have learned over a period of time (Peters et al., 2009). It was found that the learning portfolio acts as a tool of communication between preschool and school and the child exercises their power by sharing their own portfolio and by their voice being heard in a meaningful way and enabled the primary teachers to learn about children's past experiences (Peters et al., 2009). While their use is viewed to be beneficial for children and communication, the use of them can be reliant on the types of relationships developed between both professionals, they can be cherished items by parents who may be reluctant to let them go to school. They also take time to build, which is a precious resource in both sectors and can rely heavily on each individual teachers response (O'Kane, 2016). While information sharing is seen as important, joint meetings of the two professionals to share information and network is also seen as possibly improving communication (NCCA, 2018).

Joint teacher meetings.

Preschool teacher and primary teacher meetings to share information are seen as a positive transition activity among professionals (Brostrom, 2002; NCCA, 2018). The NCCA (2018) transition initiative along with the sharing information template, gave both professionals the opportunity to have face to face meetings to discuss the information in more detail and a follow up conversation in September. Joint meetings with parents were also encouraged, which in some cases were jointly chaired by both professionals. In the report of the initiative, the NCCA state how these sort of activities had helped to build good professional relationships which then fostered confidence in each side sharing their professional expertise (NCCA, 2018). The value of these meetings was seen in the findings of this initiative. Preschool/school visits, a similar transition activity, that can involve both children and teachers is discussed in the literature.

Preschool and primary school visits.

Preschool and school visits by the respective teachers, the children and their families in an effort to smooth transition is discussed in the literature (Fabian, 2013; Peters, 2002). Peters (2002) found that while teachers from both sectors generally agreed that school visits are a good idea they could not agree on the nature and frequency of these. Brostrom (2002) noted visits helped professionals to be aware of what happens in each other's settings, seeing what happens within them will help to develop communication (Margetts, 2002). Curriculum continuity too can be achieved by each professional visiting the opposite learning environment and observing the practice there (Fabian, 2013). In Ireland, from an initiative on transition by NCCA (2018) it was found that mutual visits to each other's work place was a worthwhile

activity, as each learned about the learning environment, pedagogy and curriculum of the other. Peters (Peters et al., 2009) points out that while there may be difficulties the benefit of school visits should outweigh the difficulties and they should be organised in a way that is not over whelming for the teachers and their classes.

This chapter has explored the literature on transition and the processes of cross-sectoral communication. The significance of both transition and cross-sectoral communication was justified in the beginning of the chapter. The macro-level influences of transitions and communication was presented and included a discussion on national policy and initiatives, recognition of the preschool sector, Aistear in terms of curriculum continuity, contextual differences and their effect on communication, time and workload and data protection. Following this, the micro-level influences of the topic were delineated where the topic of school readiness including new perspectives of school readiness, the co-location of schools and preschools and micro-level time and workload were considered. Finally, micro-level strategies were outlined including sharing information processes, joint meetings and preschool/school visits were discussed. The review of the literature has led to the research question: What are educators' perceptions of the processes of communication between the preschool and primary school sectors during transition, including facilitators, barriers and strategies to improve communication? How the research was designed and carried out is outlined in the next chapter.

EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE PROCESSES OF COMMUNICATION

Chapter two - Methodology

In this chapter the method chosen to conduct the research will be discussed. The ethical considerations for the project will be outlined first and will include discussions on ethical considerations for: the research instrument, power, bias, anonymity versus confidentiality and informed consent. The discussion will then move on to the research design and will outline how it is most appropriate for the research question. The research instrument will then be discussed and defended. Information on the formation of questions and the conducting of interviews in the literature will be presented. The sampling strategy chosen will be explained in detail. Finally, the data analysis section will explain the data analysis process and how the data will be presented in the next chapter. The aim of this chapter is to fully outline the research method used while also defending the choice of design. This research aims to examine preschool teachers' and primary school teachers' perceptions of the process of communication between sectors. The investigation will centre on importance of transition and communication, barriers and facilitators and strategies to improve communication.

Research Design

Merriam (2009) points out that research is defined as inquiring into or investigating something in a systematic manner. While there are many types of research a popular distinction often made in exploring research design is between qualitative and quantitative work. Qualitative research is often located in the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism is where reality is understood as socially constructed; there is no single absolute reality but rather multiple realities that depend on peoples interpretations of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). In contrast, quantitative research, with its focus on quantifiable data, is located in the positivist paradigm. Unlike interpretivism, positivism

assumes that there is a reality that is "observable, stable and measurable" and that knowledge gained is labelled "scientific" (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). Experimental research, for example, would take a positivist stance.

Silverman (2010) explains that qualitative research is "about understanding the human experience" (p.119). Within qualitative research researchers are more interested in how people interpret their experiences and what meaning they assign to those experiences (Merriam, 2009, p. 13), Merriam also cites Van Maunen's (1979) definition that:

> Qualitative research is an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency of certain naturally occurring phenomenon in the social world.

Bell (2010) supports the idea that qualitative research is more appropriate when researchers are concerned with gathering information to "understand people's perceptions of the world" (p.6). Characteristics of qualitative research include: a focus on meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and inductive processes and rich description of the data where words and pictures, rather than numbers, convey to the reader what has been learned (Merriam, 2009).

To choose the type of methodology; the type of data desired must be identified initially. In this case, the type of data desired was education professionals' perceptions of their communication with each other rather than an objective reality. Therefore, qualitative research was deemed the most appropriate approach. The desire to gather

professionals' perceptions of their experiences of communication also fits in well to the idea of multiple realities that are formed through interacting with others (Merriam, 2009). A quantitative research with its focus on numerical data and one absolute reality being formed would have been wholly unsuitable for the research and its aims (Merriam, 2009). While is was acknowledged that a qualitative research design is important to obtain rich data there were also risks. As the researcher was the primary research instrument, bias can present itself easily. However, by identifying the bias and monitoring how it may have shaped the interpretation of the data the risk can be reduced or eliminated. This point and its implications have been explored in detail in the ethics section. Merriam (2009) also describes what competencies a qualitative researcher needs. A qualitative researcher must:

- Have a questioning stance

- Tolerate ambiguity

- Be a careful observer

- Be able to ask good questions

- Think inductively

- Be comfortable with writing

Ethics

Ethical considerations are inevitable when doing research with people (Silverman, 2010). Every researcher wants to contribute knowledge to their particular field that is believable and trustworthy (Merriam, 2009). Therefore anticipating these ethical issues and putting measures in place to ensure they are dealt with appropriately was not an option but an essential exercise in the planning of research (Denscombe,

2010). Ethical approval for this project was granted by Marino Ethics in Research Committee (MERC). While it was essential to consider the ethical guidelines of the educational institution that applies (Bell, 2010), the validity and reliability of research can rely heavily on the ethics of the researcher herself (Merriam, 2009) including the researcher's values, integrity and ethical stance. In other words, researchers must be as trustworthy as the research (Merriam, 2009). It was important that the researcher was "conscious of the ethical issues that pop up during the research process and examine their own philosophical orientation" (Merriam, 2009, p. 235).

Ethics of research instrument.

Interviews can cause ethical issues in terms of the risks they bring to the participant. They have the potential make the participant feel like their privacy is being invaded, embarrassed by certain questions or say things that they did not intend to say (Merriam, 2009). Merriam also discusses the potential lasting effects of an interview on a participant like negative feelings on a topic or the resurfacing of painful memories. It was not anticipated that the interviews for the research had a high likelihood of causing these sorts of issues. However, it was important to keep their potential to do so in mind. It was also important that the researcher considered her own interview type, to have a balance between being non-judgemental while also being aware that it was not a therapeutic session and also remaining responsive to the participant (Merriam, 2009).

Power.

The ethical consideration of power was important in this case. I am the Project Leader for several community run/not-for-profit early childhood education services across Dublin and was very aware that interviewing staff could skew the data. There

was a concern that they may have wanted to provide the information they think was wanted rather than a true representation of their perceptions. There was also the potential for them to be intimidated by the position of authority held and not feel completely comfortable being honest. To combat this, a decision was made that staff that had a personal connection would not be asked to participate in the research supported by the argument that too much information provided to the participants can bias the data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). It was feared that my professional role and background may have inhibited participants from truly expressing their thoughts, opinions and feelings on the topic therefore when the participants were chosen disclosure of that information was decided against.

Bias.

Bias can be as a result of having strong views on the topic and can appear "knowingly or unwittingly" (Bell, 2010, p. 169). Bell also notes that it can occur by only choosing confirming data in analysis. The idea of the potential for bias to appear is especially important when analysing and presenting the data. However, awareness of bias was the key to overcoming it. The data has to be filtered through the researcher and their "particular theoretical position and biases" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 232–233). It was important to not only include this confirming data but also include disconfirming data, data which may have gone against my opinion, as well as making sure I was critical of the interpretation of the data (Bell, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Alluding to positionality of the person conducting research is important for any research. Due to my personal and professional standing on the importance of early childhood education and the need for early childhood education professionals who work outside primary school to be recognised, there was a chance that bias could occur in the analysis of the data. To

combat this, both confirming data and non-confirming data was included in the analysis. The data was presented in a critical manner with support from the literature and not based on opinion. My research supervisor coached me to ensure criticality in the presentation of the data.

Anonymity vs. confidentiality.

Anonymity is something that is provided generally by quantitative research, using surveys and means that no one, not even the researcher can identify them. Whereas, confidentiality can be provided by interviews in qualitative research as the researcher can identify the participants. (Bell, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Confidentiality is about protecting the participant's right to privacy (Cohen et al., 2011) and as the participant was identifiable by the researcher only confidentiality was assured for the participants. Bell (2010) also points out that researchers must ensure that what they mean by confidentiality must be spelled out clearly to the participant and to only promise what can be delivered. It was important to ensure that no identifying information of a participant was disclosed (Cohen et al., 2011) so the use of pseudonyms for the participants, parents, children and colleagues was adopted. This was explained through the consent form and the participants were reassured about the security and length of the storage recordings and how they will be destroyed. Through the consent form (see appendix 1) exactly what is meant by confidentiality was explained to ensure participants were fully aware of what they were consenting to.

Informed consent.

Informed consent respects and protects the autonomy of the participant. Autonomy requires the participants to weigh up the pros and cons of participation and

decide themselves whether to participate or not (Cohen et al., 2011). It is a process that involves careful planning, explanation and consultation (Bell, 2010). All participants within research should have enough information about the project in order to make a judgement as to whether they want to participate in it or not (Denscombe, 2010). It has four aspects; competence, voluntarism, comprehension and full information (Cohen et al., 2011). Cohen et al. explain that to obtain informed consent the participant must be responsible, mature individuals that can make correct decisions when provided with all the information. Voluntarism is ensuring participants are fully aware that they freely choose to take part. Comprehension requires participants to fully understand the nature of the project and the information provided to them. Full information, that the researcher knows, should be provided to potential participants.

Informed consent was achieved by devising a consent form that included an information cover sheet. The cover sheet was written in a way the participants understood the information and included all information relating to the research, a clear explanation that participation was completely voluntary and the commitment needed from participants (Denscombe, 2010). Bullet points outlining what exactly the participant was consenting to were included underneath. The consent form was given to participants, in writing (Denscombe, 2010), prior to the interview process so that the participants had ample time to read, re-read, clarify items and ask questions (Bell, 2010). This allowed the creation of a formal record of agreement to participate and also made sure that the researcher was protected from accusations of improper recruitment of participants (Denscombe, 2010). At interview stage the researcher confirmed that the informed consent letter was read and understood by the participant to ensure they

understood their role and responsibilities (Cohen et al., 2011) and both the researcher and participant signed a copy.

Research Instrument

Semi-Structured interviews were used as the research instrument for this research as it was felt that they would be most appropriate tool for collecting the data. Interviews are a "powerful implement for researchers" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 409). They are a favourable tool for gathering data from people as it enables participants to discuss their perceptions of a topic, the world they live in and express how they regard a situation from their own point of view (Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). Interviews should be a specifically planned event, that require careful thought, preparation, conduct and sensitivity, with a specific purpose and do not just occur naturally (Cohen et al., 2011; Denscombe, 2010). They are normally question-based and asked by an interviewer who is looking for detailed responses (Cohen et al., 2011). Interviews are conducted as a means of gathering information important to the research aims, testing hypotheses, coming up with new ones, identifying relationships or following up on unprecedented data already collected by other instruments (Cohen et al., 2011; Drever, 1995). They are necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings or how people see the world (Merriam, 2009).

The main difference between the different types of interviews is their structure. The structure of an interview can vary from the formal, where a researcher has a specific schedule, to the less formal, where the researcher has flexibility with the schedule, to the least formal where general topics to be covered make up the interview schedule (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are in the middle between structured and un-structured and are usually used in qualitative research (Merriam,

2009). Semi-structured or non-directive are the form of interview that should be used when the researcher is looking for more unique, personalised, non-standard data (Cohen et al., 2011). They should have a clear list of issues to be addressed or questions to be answered yet allow for flexibility. Interviewees should be allowed to talk extensively on each point and should be encouraged to elaborate (Denscombe, 2010; Drever, 1995).

It is a data collection tool that is flexible (Cohen et al., 2011; Drever, 1995; Silverman, 2010). It can be controlled while still allowing spontaneity in the participants' answers enabling both verbal and non-verbal communication like hesitation, pauses, tone of voice and facial expressions. Interviews are adaptable, the focus can be changed to ensure interesting ideas are followed up, probe the participants' responses while investigating motives and feelings (Silverman, 2010). Semi-structured interviews are viewed as a good tool as they ensure all topics are covered while still allowing flexibility. Interviews allow greater depth in responses than any other data collection method. They are useful for open-ended or sensitive questions and they get a higher response rate than questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2011). However, they are expensive in terms of the researchers' time and the participants' time, they can often be inconvenient to organise, open to interviewer bias and subjectivity and it is impossible to ensure complete anonymity (Cohen et al., 2011). Silverman (2010) also warns that interviews are extremely time consuming as they require transcription and analysing responses can be difficult. He also claims that it is important for researchers to give the participants the opportunity to discuss what experiences have been significant to them, instead of what is significant for the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate tool for the collection of the data desired for this project because they

are guided yet flexible, allowing structure while also having the freedom to probe participants.

To plan an interview, it is important that the objectives of the research are considered. These objectives should be evident in the interview schedule where the questions reflect what it is the researcher is trying to find out. It is useful to consider issues like subject matter, the level of depth needed, kind of information sought and the question type to be used (Cohen et al., 2011). The interview schedule builds confidence in the researchers as it includes the list of questions they would like to cover. Questions in semi-structured interviews are either all open-ended or have a mix of closed-ended (demographic questions) and open-ended (Merriam, 2009). Open-ended questions are useful within a semi-structured interview as they are flexible, encourage depth, allow the researcher to clear up any misunderstandings, encourage cooperation, establish rapport and to see the true beliefs of the respondent (Cohen et al., 2011). Open-ended questions also allow one to generate information that may not have been thought of before (Bell, 2010). Cohen et al. (2011) state that these questions can lead to unexpected information from the participant. However this could also be seen as a benefit to the research. Open-ended questions were devised for this research and leading or presumptive questions were avoided. Simple, familiar language was used, and helped to elicit better responses from participants and open-ended questions were included to ensure a better interview (Merriam, 2009).

The types of questions that are most suitable for a semi-structured interview include: experience or behaviour questions, opinions and values questions, feelings questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions and demographic questions (Patton, 2002 cited by Merriam, 2009). Hypothetical questions where the respondent imagines a

situation, devil's advocate questions that are opposing to a widely thought viewpoint, ideal position question where the respondent is asked to describe their ideal situation and interpretive questions where the researcher can clarify the respondents view are all viewed by Strauss, Schatzmann, Bucher and Sabshini (1981) (cited in Merriam, 2009) as most suitable to semi-structured interviews.

When developing questions, Cohen et al. (2011) suggest to start with a broad statement and then narrow it down to the actual question. Whether the questions are framed directly or in-directly should also be considered. Asking less direct questions will elicit more of a response and will ensure the participant will not detect bias. If direct questions are needed Cohen et al. suggest they are included in the beginning of the schedule and the less direct questions come after and easier to answer questions can come first with more difficult ones to come after. Drever (1995) suggests avoiding stereotypes and biases, double negatives, long complicated sentences and leading questions. The use of prompts and probes can be essential for drawing more data from the respondents, but cannot be specified in advance (Denscombe, 2010; Drever, 1995; Merriam, 2009). Prompts can include remaining silent, repeating a question or offering some examples while probes include asking for an example, clarification or more details (Denscombe, 2010). The questions were developed based on the literature, the interview began with direct questions about the participants qualifications, work experience and the setting they worked in. Broad questions around the participants' perceptions of the importance of transition and communication were asked first which then led on to more specific questions around barriers, facilitators and strategies.

As it is considered good practice the interview schedule was piloted before the data collection process began (Bell, 2010; Drever, 1995). Merriam (2009) views the

piloting of the interview as essential as it would ensure the researcher tests out the

schedule while practicing their interviewing skills. The interview schedule was piloted

on two people, one preschool teacher and one primary teacher. Through piloting,

confusing and useless questions were identified both by me and the pilot participants.

Questions were re-organised in terms of their phrasing, but the meaning of the question

remained the same. The pilot also gave the pilot participants a chance to give feedback

about the questions and the interview style. One of these participants pointed out the

lack of probing after a short answer. This was taken on board for the actual interviews

and the use of prompts and probes were more frequent.

Cohen et al. (2011) explains some rules of interviewing within research.

Developing a rapport with the participant is essential to ensure openness and honesty

form a participant, ensuring accurate data is obtained. To combat the interviewer bias, it

should be recognised and controlled by building it into the design. While the interview

is not a conversation it is still a social encounter and not merely an exchange of

information and remembering this when conducting an interview will help to put the

participants at ease (Merriam, 2009). While interviewing it is important to consider how

the interviewer comes across, ensuring they are respectful, clear, polite, positive,

sensitive and professional will help towards a successful interview (Denscombe, 2010).

Being prepared to motivate the participants to discuss their opinions, feelings, thoughts

and experiences will be useful if the interviewee becomes bored or disinterested (Cohen

et al., 2011). It is important for the interviewer to set the scene for the interviewee, they

should ensure they know there are no right or wrong answers to their questions, they

should have informed consent and given permission to be recorded. Within a good

quality interview the interviewee should be speaking more than the interviewer (Cohen

et al., 2011). However Denscombe (2010) warns that before deciding on interviews as a research instrument the researchers must ensure they have access to the prospective interviewees.

Purposive Sampling

Sampling allows a researcher to produce accurate findings without having to collect data from the whole population (Denscombe, 2010). The importance of choosing the correct sampling strategy for research cannot be over-estimated. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) state "The quality of a piece of research not only stands or falls by the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy" (p. 143). The sampling strategy chosen must be fit for purpose, being mindful of the project's design, methodology, constraints and timescales (Cohen et al., 2011). A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure critical thinking about the population who were to be studied; and thus enabled the sample to be chosen carefully (Silverman, 2010). Purposive sampling strategy is a non-probability sampling strategy, however it does heavily rely on the establishment of good practice to ensure a good standard of selection (Denscombe, 2010). Its name is self-explanatory; the sample is chosen for a specific purpose. While size is important, there are no hard and fast rules for choosing a sample size. Generally for qualitative research the sample will be smaller not only because of cost, in terms of both researcher and participants' time and money (Cohen et al., 2011), but also because of the amount of depth that is expected from a qualitative piece of research. The size of a sample will also depend on the question being asked and the data that needs to be gathered (Merriam, 2009).

Purposive sampling and researchers who use it do not claim it is a representational strategy but rather is "deliberately and unashamedly selective and biased" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 157). With purposive sampling, the researcher hand picks participants on the basis of identifying certain characteristics that are relevant to the specific needs of the researcher and the research (Cohen et al., 2011). In qualitative research the researcher wishes to discover, understand or gain insight into something, therefore they must chose a sample from which most information can be learned (Merriam, 2009). It means accessing people who possess the knowledge needed in order to comment on what the researcher is interested in finding out, in other words, acquiring in-depth knowledge from sources who are able to give it, choosing cases that have their own value while still trying to obtain rich data (Cohen et al., 2011). Participants can be chosen on the basis of their attributes like profession, qualification or length of service or they are likely to be seen as being able to produce valuable data because of their knowledge on the topic (Denscombe, 2010). It is also often used within qualitative research when it is not possible to include a random sample due to lack of information on the population or difficulty in contacting the population (Cohen et al., 2011; Denscombe, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Typical case sampling, maximum variation sampling and reputational sampling are all considered as different types of purposive sampling. For the research being discussed, maximum variation sampling was the most appropriate as it included the widest possible range of characteristics of the sample (Cohen et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009). Including a range of participants in the sample will "illuminate the research question at hand" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 35).

Cohen et al. (2011) gives a step by step guide in choosing a purposive sample.

1. Decide whether your research will include the whole population or just a
   sample.

2. Identify who the population are, its important features and its size

3. Identify your sampling strategy

4. Ensure access to your sample is guaranteed

5. Identify the people you require

6. Calculate the number or participants you require and build in a contingency
   number by over sampling.

7. Decide how to manage and gain access and contact with your sample

A good start is determining the selection criteria that are essential to choosing the people to be studied, spelling out each criterion and why it is important (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews with twelve participants were conducted with six educators from the ECE sector and six educators from the Primary sector. These included participants from different types of early years services e.g. full-day, part-day and sessional, participants with different qualifications, participants who work in co-located with primary schools and preschools or participants who work in settings in areas of disadvantage and non-disadvantage designated areas. The primary parameters included teachers from Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Deis) schools, Non-Deis schools, newly qualified or qualified 5+ years etc., primary teachers that had a preschool located in their school, primary teachers with no preschool and primary teachers working in a school with an Early Start. No difficulties were experienced in accessing the sample as I

had access to many contacts within both sectors. Participants who engaged in the research are detailed in table 1. The interview schedule is included as appendix two.

Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted on the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and the process was guided by the literature. "Qualitative data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, cited by Denscombe, 2010, p. 302). Its goal is to make sense of the data, by consolidating, reducing and interpreting what participants have said and it is the process used to answer a research question (Merriam, 2009). Analysis and the conclusions drawn should come from meticulously reading the data (Denscombe, 2010) and this was ensured through transcription of the interviews so the data could be read and reread thoroughly. Merriam (2009) describes it as the process of meaning-making and these meanings, understandings or insights are what constitutes the findings of a study. Data analysis is based on the idea of discovering new things from the data and the possible generation of theories, moving from the particular features of the data to form more generalised conclusions (Denscombe, 2010).

Data analysis began by identifying segments of the data that relate to the research question (Merriam, 2009). This was done through coding and is a more formal process of interpreting the data (Denscombe, 2010). Coding allowed for the gathering of the key issues within the data which eventually brought overall conclusions of the study to the fore (Bell, 2010). It was used to reduce the data from a mass of raw information to specific topics within the data and helps to visualise the patterns emerging from the data (Roberts-Holmes, 2014) It is a process that can be repetitive (Denscombe, 2010). The process of coding begins by looking at the data, taking out

small pieces of information and assigning a name or code to it, moving onto the next piece comparing it to the first piece and if it is different assigning it a new code and continue this process until there is no more new data emerging (Merriam, 2009). Units of data to be coded can be one word, a line, a sentence or whole paragraphs and depends on the research design (Denscombe, 2010). Codes can take many forms; letters, numbers, colours or words are all appropriate (Merriam, 2009; Roberts-Holmes, 2014) as long as they it is clear what they represent (Denscombe, 2010). Coding was conducted on the data collected, it began by looking at complete sentences, letters and roman numerals were used to code the topics.

The next step of the process is when each code is sorted into a category, these categories or themes will form the main arguments or findings (Merriam, 2009; Roberts-Holmes, 2014) and the key headings (Denscombe, 2010). Codes were reviewed and grouped into themes and subthemes (Table 2). Inductive coding where the data inform the codes and themes is better for qualitative analysis (Merriam, 2009), moving from the particular to the general (Denscombe, 2010). However, Merriam (2009) points out that during the analysis it will become more deductive as themes will be tested and evidence supporting the themes will be sought from the data. Eventually coding will result in the formation of concepts and hypotheses (Denscombe, 2010). This was the case at the end of the coding process as no new codes appeared but rather fit into the existing ones.

When presenting the data, Roberts-Holmes (Roberts-Holmes, 2014) points out that it is important that the data tells the complexity of the research, avoiding definitive arguments is essential in qualitative analysis (Merriam, 2009). People, by nature, will always have differing perspective on experiences so it is not the reality for all

participants to have the same view. Including both supporting and contradicting data

will show the reader the complexity of the participants views (Roberts-Holmes, 2014)

and the reliability of the findings (Merriam, 2009). A high quality data analysis section

will involve the discussing, interrogating and breaking down of the data with what the

literature says (Roberts-Holmes, 2014) and personal prejudices and biases should not be

included (Denscombe, 2010). For qualitative research the writing of the data analysis

section generally a descriptive account on what was found from the data collection

process (Merriam, 2009). The data was presented in a descriptive manner with a

narrative tone. The voices of the participants were represented through direct quotes.

While the data was carefully chosen to ensure the validity of the findings (Denscombe,

2010) both conforming and non-conforming data was included in the discussion. Biases

and prejudices were not present in the analysis due to the awareness of them as an

ethical issue and with the support of the thesis supervisor.

Limitations

This is a small-scale research project and any findings derived from the data

collected were not generalisable. While great consideration was given to avoiding bias

in the data analysis there is always potential for it to appear in qualitative research.

Although a friendly atmosphere during the interviews was created there was also

potential for the participants to not give completely honest answers to the questions

asked for fear or being offensive or disrespectful to the opposite sector and having the

possibility to skew the data. The transition to primary school and cross-sectoral

communication was a relatively new topic for some of the participants and many cited

that they had never thought about either of the topics before the interview. This means

that richer data could still be obtained from participants who had more experience on the topic.

This chapter has outlined and defended the research design. Ethical considerations in every aspect of the project have been considered and discussed along with an outline of the research instrument. The sampling strategy was explained and details of the sample of participants were provided. An explanation of the data analysis process was laid out to ensure understanding and lastly the limitations of the research were identified. The next chapter will focus on the main findings of the study along with the literature to support them.

Chapter 3 - Data Analysis

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings of the research in the context of the literature. This section will provide a discussion on four themes and their implications for communication. Throughout the discussion the participants' views on the facilitators, barriers and strategies in relation to the themes will be presented. The themes include: the importance of transition, the importance of communication, the macro-level influences on communication and the micro-level influences on communication. Macro-level influences include curriculum continuity, national policy, recognition of the preschool sector, context differences, time and workload, confidentiality and data protection and shared CPD. Micro-level influences on communication include, views of school readiness, co-located preschools and schools, time and workload, sharing information processes, joint teacher meetings and preschool/school visits.

The Importance of Transition

Over the last decade the level of interest in the transition by researchers and academics both in Ireland and internationally has increased (CECDE, 2006; Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; O'Kane, 2007; O'Kane, 2013, 2016; O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a; Ring et al., 2016). This view of its significance was shared by the participants in the research and data collected centred around its importance on future schooling. The importance of attending preschool also featured in the participants' answers.

The importance of transition success.

To gauge what level of importance participants placed on the transition to primary and to delve deeper into their views on its significance to the child, the participants were probed about what it would mean for the child if they did not experience a smooth transition to primary. Generally, the participants' replies indicated that they felt it would have a lasting effect on the child's attitude towards education and their future schooling. By experiencing difficulty at this time children can become disengaged with the educational system (O'Kane & Hayes, 2006) and children who struggle more during of transition can see the gap between themselves and their peers widen over time (O'Kane & Hayes, 2010).The view point of O'Kane and Hayes is congruent with the experiences of both preschool and primary teachers in this sample, evidenced by their first-hand experience: "I notice here that if some of the kids who don't transition well I feel they get a negative opinion of school and a negative sense of education" (Participant 4 primary teacher). A preschool participant also explains:

> I think that would affect their future schooling. I think if a child starts when they are too young, or when they are not ready socially and emotionally especially, I think that can have a negative effect on the child…it stays with the child…they have a negative impression of it…. I think with children it can have a lasting effect throughout their primary [experience]. (Participant 7 Preschool Teacher).

Participant 8 (preschool teacher) outlined the importance of the transition to school and the child's future schooling by referring to feedback from parents of children they have had previously in their preschool "the impact can be seen later on when they go into post-primary or even third, fourth, fifth and sixth class."

One participant (Participant 3, primary school teacher) discussed how important it is for children to first "feel settled, feel safe, to feel happy in school before they begin to learn." This opinion echoes the findings of Brostrom (2002, p. 52) who explained the

importance of feeling "suitable" for school. This sense of belonging is seen as crucial

for their learning and development and their sense of well-being and belonging. The

view of the participant is further supported by Hayes et al. (2017) who tell us that a

positive attitude towards school and learning, as a result of a smooth transition, can be a

protective factor against educational disadvantage and promote resilience in those

children. This idea of a difficult transition having a lasting effect can also be seen in the

literature by O'Kane and Hayes (2010) who found that for some children who are

supported appropriately during the transition, there is a reduction in academic failure

and higher levels of self-esteem, self-control and social skills and will benefit their

future schooling (Margetts, 2007).

The importance of preschool.

The role attending preschool plays, in a successful transition, was highlighted by

four participants, echoing the findings of researchers such as Ring et al. (2016) and

Siraj-Blatchford (2010). When discussing the importance of a smooth transition one

participant (participant 7, Preschool Teacher) explained "I have seen the benefits that

early intervention can be for children and then leading on to primary; I think it's

absolutely crucial." This view is supported by Ring et al. (2016) who found that the

majority of early years educators and primary teachers felt that the FPSY had an impact

on children's readiness for school and it was seen by those participants as giving them a

good start on their educational journey.

This was especially highlighted by another participant when recounting an

experience of a child who did not attend preschool before coming to primary.

> In this school a lot of kids haven't gone to preschool and those have been the
> ones who have struggled…One child he hadn't gone to a preschool…but his

parents would not take him back out. They insisted he stayed… he is struggling, and he is in senior infants now. (Participant 3, primary teacher)

This idea is supported by Ring et al. (2016) who reported one of their participants had the same view but recounted a more positive experience of the effects of preschool. When discussing a child she taught, who was from a disadvantaged background, she felt that if the child had not attended preschool he would be as successful in school as he is now.

The Importance of Cross-Sectoral Communication

The next theme to emerge from the data was what level of importance they placed on the communication between preschool teachers and primary teachers. Out of twelve participants all of them initially answered that they viewed it as highly important. Delving deeper into their reasons for its importance, through further questioning and probing, gave a truer picture of their views. Worthwhile information being shared, preparation for teachers and the importance of communication for children with additional needs all featured in their answers.

The literature strongly advocates the idea of cross-sectoral communication and is of the view that communication should result in the development of stronger relationships between the two educational settings (CECDE, 2006a; Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; O'Kane, 2016). Among the participants, the idea of cross-sectoral communication was viewed as a positive, with five participants explicitly referring to it in a positive manner. Overall, both primary teachers and preschool teachers viewed the prospect of communication as an exciting idea. One participant said, "I think it would be brilliant for a start" (Participant 9, Primary Teacher) while another talked about how "it would be great to see the development of communication

between the preschool and primary" (Participant 12, Preschool Teacher). This view is similar to the findings of O'Kane and Hayes (2006) who found that the participants in their study were very open to the idea of cross-sectoral communication. It also possibly alludes to the idea that communication is not happening for these participants.

Three primary participants referred to the importance of communication in terms of teacher preparation. Participant 4, a primary teacher felt that by preschool teachers sharing some information it would make the process of organising classes easier. The same participant felt it would help her as a teacher to be more effective. "Yeah, it is important… to teach them in their modes of learning." While participants placed importance on communication in general initially, it seemed as their view was probed further, some only really viewed it as important for children with special educational needs.

> I don't think it would be possible or is necessary to call all the various playschools…when children start school… if a problem is to arise then the teacher would have to go to the playschool (Participant 3, primary teacher).

It would seem that this participant does not really value communication for all children entering her classroom, which would not be in line with the literature (CECDE, 2006a; Hopps, 2014; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; NCCA, 2018; O'Kane, 2016; O'Kane & Murphy, 2016b; Ring et al., 2016).

While there is some communication happening in local areas in Ireland, (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016b) it is not done in any sort of coordinated way (O'Kane, 2016). These findings are congruent with the experiences of the participants. The instances of cross-sectoral communication they experienced were examined. The level of communication the participants viewed as existing between the sectors was minimal. Out of the twelve participants all participants said they had some form contact, but it

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was minimal and reactive communication in response to a problem rather than coordinated. One participant felt that "generally there is not much communication either way" (Participant 12, preschool teacher). Another stated "I don't think the communication is strong enough" (Participant 8, preschool teacher). While another felt that "there is definitely a need to get the two groups together, but I know it is not happening at the moment" (Participant 5, primary teacher). These views are supported by many authors who discuss the lack of coordinated communication structures between the two sectors (Hopps, 2014; O'Kane, 2007, 2016; O'Toole, 2016).

The communication experienced by the participants was for sharing information, predominantly on children with special educational needs (SEN). This was done through report forms, linking with the Early Start, linking with the co-located preschool, sending report forms to primary, visit to child with SEN in primary, sending report form to preschools. Out of the six primary teachers, two only had links with the Early Start in their school (Participant 3 & 5), three had links only with the preschools on site (Participant 6, 9 & 10), one had received a report form from an outside preschool (Participant 4) and three had contact with an outside preschool because of a child with SEN (Participant 3, 9 & 10) , One (Participant 6) knew of a junior infant teacher who had sent out her own report to preschools to be returned. All these interactions, except the report form, seemed to have been in reaction to a child having difficulty in junior infants, supporting the views above. The preschool teachers' experiences were even more minimal with one stating they had received a report form from a school (Participant 7) and the other had been contacted to see if they would promote the particular primary school to their parents (Participant 12), while another was given daily information at pickups and drop-offs (Participant 1). Like the primary

participants most of the contact for preschool teachers was for children with SEN who were moving or who had already moved on to school (Participant 11 &13). In contrast, one preschool participant (participant 8, preschool teacher) listed the organised links she and her team have created with their local primary schools. It included, sharing information forms, joint meetings, parent workshops and linking with the Home School Liaison Teacher (HSCL). The minimal experiences are support by the findings of O'Kane (O'Kane, 2016) that communication and collaboration is still not happening in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

The proactive organisation of this communication can be found in other parts of the country but like this situation, it is at local level only (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016b) and in no way systematic (O'Kane, 2016). The findings here support the idea that while most professionals think communication is a good idea it is rarely happening. The participants' views on macro-level influences will be discussed below.

Macro-Level Influences on Communication

The macro-level influences on cross-sectoral communication includes the role of national policy, the role of curriculum continuity and the role of recognition of the preschool sector. Differing educational contexts, time and workload at macro-level, confidentiality and data protection and shared CPD too have the potential to influence communication. These topics have been seen by the participants as not only items for discussion but in some cases facilitators, barriers and strategies for improved communication, their perspectives are outlined below

The role of national policy in transition and communication.

While there is increasing emphasis placed on transitions in the literature, we are still to see any form of policy documentation on the topic of transition from anywhere in the world (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a). National policy was mentioned on several occasions by many of the participants and viewed as a possible facilitator, barrier and strategy to improve communication.

Six participants (Participant 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 and12) in total referred to the absence of policy, procedure and the non-compulsory nature of communication as reasons why communication is not happening. The participants illustrated their views in their answers, participant 9 felt that "it would have to be standardised for everyone to take part in it" and participant 5 finds that "It's not the done thing, there's no policy or guidelines…the department haven't made it compulsory to do so." It was also felt by the participants that if a national policy was in place communication would be easier to achieve. This idea is supported by O'Kane and Murphy (2016a) who view the absence of such policies as puzzling considering the evidence to support their existence.

Six participants in total referenced either the need for a policy to implement communication structures, the need for direction from the DES or the implementation of standardised processes for communication to facilitate communication. One participant explained her view by simply stating "if there was a policy in place it would probably help it [communication]" (Participant 3, primary teacher).

The formation of national policy was identified by the participants as a strategy for the government to implement. O'Kane (2015) is also of the opinion that if there was greater communication and collaboration at national level in terms of joint policies and

procedures among the departments governing the preschool sector and primary sector, that would filter down to the schools and preschools and encourage both sectors to communicate. Two participants spoke about the role of the government in the development of policies and procedures for transition in general but also for communication and information sharing. One participant put it simply "I would say that they need guidelines and a policy to be drawn up to make it very clear what is expected from preschool teachers and what information they are supposed to share" (Participant 5, primary teacher). Policy and procedural documentation has the potential to bring together both sectors and encourage continuity of learning experiences (Fabian, 2013), supporting the participants' view.

The role of curriculum continuity in transition and communication.

Curriculum discontinuity has been noted as affecting smooth transition and cross-sectoral communication in the literature (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002; Fabian, 2013; Hopps & Dockett, 2011; O'Kane, 2016). The continuity of curriculum, through the implementation of Aistear, was cited by the participants in terms of its potential as a facilitator of communication and a policy level strategy to improve communication. Four participants referenced Aistear, in a general way, in helping with transition and the two sectors respecting and understanding each other (O'Kane, 2013, 2015) but only one participant explicitly referenced its potential to facilitate cross-sectoral links. This participant outlined what her hope had been for Aistear's implementation by explaining;

> I thought Aistear would bridge that gap because it's a system that's there in place till children are six. It was my hope… that that would lead to communication between early years settings and primary schools (Participant 11, preschool teacher).

From this participant's answer it seemed her hope had not come to fruition. O'Kane (2013) explains that Aistear is only being somewhat implemented and there is a the need for greater engagement from preschools and primary schools. This may be achieved by providing cross-sector Aistear implementation training (Walsh et al., 2013) a strategy discussed later in the chapter.

Nine participants placed importance on the government's role in the introduction of Aistear to junior infant classes, reducing discontinuity and bridging pedagogical practices to improve communication. The consensus was by fully introducing Aistear into the junior infant classes, cross-sectoral relationships, mutual understandings and mutual respect would be fostered. When asked about what could bring the two sectors together one participant discusses her view: "I think Aistear provides the perfect place to start to draw those links…that's the perfect transitional tool" (Participant 11, preschool teacher). This idea of a shared curriculum linking both sectors together is supported in the literature. Dunlop (2013) believes where there is continuity between settings, preschool teachers and primary teachers are more likely be and feel better connected. A primary participant was of the same opinion "if we are both singing off the same hymn sheet, which we should be, I think that would facilitate a better transition as well as better communication" (Participant 4, primary teacher). This participants' thinking was conducive to the findings of the NCCA (2016) who found that during consultation, most professionals welcomed the introduction of Aistear as the sole curriculum framework for junior and senior infants as well as the two free-preschool years. Viewing it as important for the development of continuity of learning and would encourage connection and communication between the two sectors.

The role of the recognition of the preschool sector in transition and communication.

The difference in recognition and value between the preschool and primary school sector has been noted in the literature (ECI, 2016; Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). Participants talked about recognition and value placed on the preschool sector as a barrier to communication and as a strategy to improve communication. Two out of four participants who discussed this issue were primary teachers and two were preschool teachers. Both preschool teachers discussed the difference in value placed on the primary profession and the preschool profession. Participant 7 (preschool teacher) was of the view that it would limit communication between the two sectors "It just feels like one is valued more than the other, so I think that reflects in society." This is supported evidence of the vast difference in funding (DES, 2017; Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017) and pay (ECI, 2016; INTO, 2018). Participant 8 also illustrates this frustration:

> The knowledge that I feel I'm trying to offer to a principal or a teacher, I sometimes feel that I'm kind of being told "Well you don't really know what you are talking about." That limits the communication that can take place… that you are not really her equal (Participant 8, preschool teacher).

This experience was similar to that of the transitions initiative piloted by the NCCA (2018) who found that the building of reciprocal relationships was challenging at times.

When the participants were asked what the government could change to bring the two sectors together and communicate, seven participants all viewed the level of recognition of the preschool sector compared to the primary sector as an issue. This is supported by the Joint Oireachtas Committee who recommended the government to

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develop an plan to put working terms and conditions on par with the rest of the

education system (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017) The view was relatively even

amongst the primary participants and preschool participants with four preschool

participants and three primary participants discussing the issue. One participant felt

"they really need to recognise our sector more. I think once they do that at

governmental level that will have a rippling effect into the primary sector" (Participant

7, preschool teacher). A primary school participant felt the same:

> To give it the importance it deserves, I think that would change people's
> view…I think pay would help to give those teachers in preschool who have
> studied, who are very qualified the kind of status and recognition they deserve
> (Participant 4, primary teacher).

> A preschool participant felt funding was the answer to the recognition of the

preschool sector

> So, I think it needs to be treated the exact same as primary and post-primary,
> needs to be funded the same way… and until the government recognises and the
> importance of being funded in that way, not much is going to change
> (Participant 8, preschool teacher).

> This idea is supported in the Joint Oireachtas Committee report that states the

government allows the continued lack of recognition through chronic underfunding. In

2013 the GDP in Ireland for early childhood education was .1% (Houses of the

Oireachtas, 2017) minimal compared to that of the education sector which was 4.8% of

GDP in 2014 (DES, 2017).

In spite of these factors the self-efficacy beliefs of the preschool practitioners

were high in some cases and they felt they had important information to share. How

communication in the form of information sharing could help teachers prepare for the

children, inform their teaching methods and their classroom organisation were also

mentioned by the participants. While it has been noted that issues around professional

identity amongst preschool teachers may be contributing to a lack of cross-sectoral communication (O'Kane, 2016), the preschool teacher participants in this study held themselves in high regard in terms of the contribution they felt they could make to a successful transition for the children they educate. One participant discussed her knowledge and the importance of sharing that with the primary teacher "but they would certainly benefit from the knowledge that we could give them" (Participant 7, preschool teacher). Another participant echoes this view and refers to the amount of time early years professionals can be working with a child and the value of the wealth of rich information they could share (Participant 1, preschool teacher). Differences in contexts were also discussed by participants in terms of the potential to limit communication

Educational context – differences between preschool and primary school.

Difficulties children experience in the transition to primary are generally contextually based (Dockett & Perry, 2007). The differences in these contexts may also pose problems for the professionals within them and their ability to communicate and collaborate with each other. Nine participants referenced the differences in the two contexts as a barrier when it came to communicating with the opposite sector. Participants described the differences in various ways. "They are definitely separate entities" (Participant 6, primary teacher), another felt Aistear was the only similarity and "everything else is so different" (Participant 9, primary teacher), "we both feel that we're just different institutions" (Participant 10, primary teacher) and "there's a difference in the two settings" (Participant 12, preschool teacher).

The effect of these differences are supported by Neuman (2002) who found they may limit the level and type of communication and collaboration or prohibit it completely. O'Kane and Hayes (2006) state that both the primary and preschool sectors

have developed independently of each other and therefore do not share common objectives or approaches to education. Another participant alluded to the many differences between the sectors being the cause of the lack of communication stating, "we're different venues, different places, different bosses, different boards" (Participant 10, primary teacher). This idea is supported by O'Kane (2013) too, tells us that the preschool context and primary context differ in nearly every aspect. Although most participants who mentioned the two contexts as being different, which is supported by the literature (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Neuman, 2002; O'Kane, 2013), one participant had felt that they were not that different after all and that the barrier was more about peoples' perceptions of the two educational contexts. She explains, "It's kind of a misconception that playschools and junior infants are completely different settings, I think nowadays they are a lot more similar" (Participant 5, primary teacher). It is an interesting thought, whether it is more about how people view the two sectors as a possible barrier for them or is it down to the context itself. The literature would suggest that the difference in the two sectors is a legitimate reason for lack of communication (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Neuman, 2002; O'Kane, 2013) and not in fact about perceptions.

While many of the participants did mention how different both sectors are and how it could be a barrier to communication, they were mostly general comments on the differences. There was little reference to specific contextual differences like pedagogical practices or CPD differences (O'Kane, 2016) as barriers to communication. Time and workload at macro-level was seen by the participants as one of the main barriers to communication

Time and workload at macro-level.

Six participants blamed time, workload and lack of non-contact time as to why communication does not happen. Before, 2017 there was no funded non-contact time for any professionals in the preschool sector (Lyons, 2017). Primary teachers spend most of their working day teaching and due to the curricular and assessment demands of Aistear and the Primary Curriculum (Gray & Ryan, 2016) places on them this time is generally taken up by preparing for the class the next day or making medium or long term plans. Confidentiality and data protection was also referenced as barrier.

Confidentiality and data protection.

Confidentiality and data protection was mentioned by a total of five participants, three were primary participants and two were preschool participants. O'Kane and Murphy (2016a) also found data protection to be an issue, infringing on the development of national policies. The three primary participants all viewed the sharing of information as risky because of data protection concerns and viewed this as contributing to the limitation of communication. Participant 10 (primary school participant) felt that it was difficult as you had to think about "making the information available, where does it all end up? Data protection would be a huge one [barrier]." This view was somewhat shared by the preschool participants. Participant 7 felt it she wouldn't have the "authority to ring up a school about a child." This may be apparent because the rules for the transferring of information and data protection are not as clear for preschool to primary transfer as they are for the primary to post-primary (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016a). With the introduction of GDPR on the 28th of May 2018 this could complicate things further.

Macro-level strategies.

Macro-level strategies viewed by the participants to be the responsibility of the government to improve communication have been discussed previously along with the supporting literature. These included the role of curriculum continuity and the role of recognising the preschool sector in transition. The idea of shared CPD bridging the two sectors is another strategy mentioned by the participants and supported in the literature.

Shared continual professional development (CPD).

The idea of combined professional development opportunities providing a space to support communication and this improved communication enhancing the transition is supported in the literature (Peters, 2002). While two participants felt separate training was just as appropriate to gain knowledge, three participants gave weight to the idea of shared training, One participant explained how teachers could gain knowledge on practices in preschool "Well, I think, during their training. One module would suffice for one term." (Participant 9, primary teacher). However, shared CPD may the optimal way to develop shared understanding and communication amongst the two sectors according to the literature. Neuman (2002) is an advocate for shared training and believes it can offer the opportunity for professionals from different fields to learn from each other and reflect on their own practice, achieve core common knowledge and develop relationships. Another participant aligns with this view and explains her stance on shared training.

> There are things that are common and that everyone could be doing together to build those bridges. I suppose, like doctors, studying and then some go off and specialise in this and some go off and specialise in that. Then when Doctor A has a case actually Doctor B could help with and he's got that link, we don't… I guess training needs to be addressed (Participant 11, preschool teacher).

This idea is supported too in the Irish context by O'Kane (2015) and Walsh et al., (2013) who are of the opinion that when joint educational experiences for professionals take place, communication can be enhanced and will in turn create greater cohesion of the two sectors, benefiting all stakeholders. After considering the participants' the influences on communication at macro-level, he participants' perspectives on micro-level influences will be presented next.

Micro-Level Influences on Communication

The participants' views of the facilitators, barriers and strategies in terms of the micro-level influences on cross-sectoral communication will be discussed in the next section. The idea of school readiness, co-located preschools and Early Start settings, time and workload at micro-level and strategies that can be adopted at micro-level and what they mean for communication will be presented.

Expectations of school readiness.

For the participants, school readiness centred around the ideas of optimal school going age and the appropriate skills and dispositions needed for the first years of primary school.

School starting age.

School starting age was referenced by three participants (Participant 4, primary school teacher, participant 5, primary school teacher and participant 7, preschool teacher) as being an indicator of a successful transition to primary with all these participants feeling that age played a big role in terms of a successful transition for every child. This finding is congruent with that of Ring et al (2016) whose participants

also referenced school starting age. When referring to the school starting age of four

and the demands placed on four-year olds by the primary curriculum one participant felt

that children should be older when starting school, "I would say they would need

another year before they are ready… most of them coming in are four…so I would

think it would benefit them better to be that little bit older" (Participant 4 Primary

teacher). This viewpoint is in line with the findings of Ring et al. (2016) where the

majority of primary school participants viewed four and a half to five years, with a

smaller amount viewing five to five and a half as being the optimal school starting age.

A child being older beginning primary school was also mentioned by Participant

7 (Preschool Teacher) who felt that by starting school at age five would give children

an advantage. This is supported by the findings of Ring et al. (2016) where half of early

years participants felt five to five and a half as the optimal school starting age. While it

is not a vast difference in opinion on the school going age, it is not a cohesive opinion

either and the same can be said for the skills and dispositions needed for primary

school.

Skills and dispositions needed for primary school.

Among the participants there were opposing views of the skills and dispositions

needed for primary school and what preschools should or should not be doing to

prepare children for school. The participants felt this tension has the possibility to be a

barrier to communication. This is supported by O'Kane (2007) who found that the

beliefs, expectations and classroom practices of both preschool and primary teachers

have a great impact on transition. One participant expressed some frustration around the

primary school's expectations on skills.

> What we found is that is there is a lot of focus put on physical tasks… that they can put on their coat, that they can open their lunch box, that they can listen… Whereas I suppose we're looking at it more from a social and emotional point of view and they don't really fit together (Participant 8, preschool teacher).

O'Kane (2013) supported the need for cohesion in expectations of children and was of the view that in order for the professionals form each sector to communicate and collaborate on transition there needs to be a clearer understanding of meanings between the two educational spheres.

A new way of thinking about school readiness.

School Readiness is a loaded term, that is complex and has multiple connotations (Ring et al., 2016). The importance of child readiness featured in four of the participants' responses and valued social and emotional readiness more than academic readiness, in line with the literature (O'Kane, 2015, 2016; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006). The participants' responses did elicit some thinking on the considerable focus placed on child readiness. The view that the child should be ready for the demands of school was evident by its frequency of occurrence during the interviews.

> We obviously do our bit and try our best to get them ready, taking their shoes off, putting on their coats…You have to be more independent and keep up with the group, so I think they have to be ready for all that or they will just be lost (Participant 1, preschool teacher).

However, this view of children needing to be ready for the demands primary school places on them in junior infants does not align with the most recent literature on the interactionist approach (Dockett & Perry 2002, cited by Ring et al., 2016), which outlines the importance of ready schools (O'Kane, 2016). One participant (Participant 8, preschool teacher) from the sample of twelve, questioned whether preparing children for what she knew they would face in primary school or teachers learning more about what they were doing in preschool and continuing that in junior infants, was more

appropriate. Being a ready school means the school, the teachers and their practices to be ready for the variety of children who will come into their classes just as much as the children need to be ready for the school (Dunlop, 2013). The perspectives of all participants who spoke about readiness for school were very much in the maturationist-environmental sphere, similar to the findings of Ring et al. (2016) and not the more forward thinking interactionist view (Dockett & Perry, 2002 cited in Ring et al., 2016).

Co-located preschools and Early Start settings.

The literature around facilitators to communication is not as readily available as some of the other topics discussed, so it deemed was worthwhile to probe the participants on what they felt does or would facilitate communication. The most talked about facilitators were the formation of transition policies and procedures that would include specific processes on communication, curriculum continuity and the proximity of the preschool to the school.

The location of a preschool setting within a school can be beneficial to the transition to primary (Hassett, 2014). Five primary participants either had a preschool or an Early Start on the premises. From the interviews it seemed that for the participants whose preschool were co-located with a school, primary school who were co-located with a preschool and primary schools who operated Early Start, communication was more regular than those in schools and preschools with no preschool setting or primary school sharing the same building. It is important to note that the literature around facilitators of cross-sectoral communication is sparse and even more so for supporting the idea of proximity as a facilitator. However, when asked what they felt facilitated this communication all of them referenced the proximity of the early childhood setting as a facilitating communication "The main factor was the fact that they are on-site too,

so it was a walk down to the end of the corridor… that is really the only reason it happened" (Participant 9, primary teacher).

The participants' view is supported by Hassett (2014), who found that the co-location of preschools and primary schools encouraged communication about children's needs and for preschool teachers enabled more familiarity with the school environment. The same was said of the Early Start programme. "Well for us it's just that they are here in the school. Other than that, it wouldn't be happening… they are within the building, they are colleagues, so it is much easier" (Participant 5, primary teacher). The Department of Education and Skills (2014), in a review of Early Start found that parents viewed Early Start to ease the transition to primary because of the location. While it is not directly related to cross-sectoral communication it is related to transition and may indicate the importance of location for parents and therefore the benefits of location. There is very little explicit literature available to support the idea of co-location as a facilitator of cross-sectoral communication, meaning this is possibly a new finding for the research.

Time and workload at micro-level.

Another concern that may limit communication the participants discussed was the amount of preschools schools may have to communicate with and vice versa. Five participants discussed this difficulty and the general view was that communicating with all preschool/schools that the children in their class came from/going to would be very challenging considering the teachers spare time and workload. One participant illustrated this point, when speaking about school visits;

> But I suppose in a class of 30, they could have all gone to different ones
> [preschools] so how could you have 30 different people here? And they have

jobs where they have to be, so they couldn't possibly [come here] (Participant 3, primary teacher)

A preschool participant (Participant 1) was of the same view as the primary teacher and commented on the amount of schools she would have to communicate with and how challenging that could be. Peters (2002) agrees with the worries of the participants as it was found that in a busy urban environment the amount of schools and preschools to communicate with each other was overwhelming and could lead to prohibiting communication between the two sectors.

Micro-level strategies.

Three strategies discussed in the literature were identified by the participants as being the most appropriate way to communicate at micro-level. Most participants viewed the development of report forms as the most appropriate way to do this while verbal communication through phone calls and the idea of learning portfolios was also mentioned. Meetings between preschool and primary school teachers were discussed and preschool/primary school visits featured as well.

Sharing information processes.

The sharing of information on preschool children moving on to primary is noted as aiding in developing cross-sectoral communication between the two sectors (Margetts, 2002; O'Kane & Hayes, 2010; Peters et al., 2009). When thinking about communication many of the participants thought of it as only information sharing for children and not developing communication for the benefit of professionals throughout the interviews, as a result there was staggering support for it being developed across the two sectors. Out of twelve participants interviewed ten felt that the sharing of information through a report form would be the most appropriate strategy. One

participant mentioned the use of a learning portfolio and two participants, one of whom also supports the idea of a report form felt a phone call would be sufficient. While there is substantial literature on the importance of communication and the transferring of documentation, there is less guidance on what information should be transferred and how (ETC Research Group, 2011 cited by O'Kane, 2016). One participant felt that a standardised report was the "most practical" (Participant 5, primary teacher) way of sharing information and another thought the only way to have the information in "black and white is to have a document" (Participant 9, primary teacher).

Supporting this view, the NCCA have now developed national template and have pilot them through their transition initiative (NCCA, 2018). O'Kane (2016) explained that these templates were to be developed to demonstrate any supports needed for the child but also their individual achievements, showing a clear progression of their development. O'Kane views the development of these templates as having the potential to benefit the development of relationships between preschool and primary teachers. While the acknowledgment of the need for sharing information by the participants and their willingness to engage in this communication is a positive step, it is questionable whether a report form, where the wealth of children's achievements over a one or two-year period is reduced to filling in boxes is most appropriate. One participant talked about the use of learning portfolios and explained how they work in the service:

> We've always done a yearbook at the end of the year. That would give very explicit examples of the work cycle, or the different areas in the classroom that they have worked through. They would have photos and documentation to say the sounds that they've learned or if they are blending sounds. That information goes to parents, but it would be of benefit to teachers (Participant 12, preschool teacher).

Peters et al. (2009) advocates the use of learning portfolios to transfer of information from preschool to primary school. The idea of learning portfolios has been developed in New Zealand where they include learning stories of children's development and highlight the child as a competent and capable learner (O'Kane, 2016). However, Peters et al. (2009) warns of the challenges of the use of learning portfolios which should be considered before adopting it as a strategy.

Joint teacher meetings.

Joint meetings were also referenced, on a lesser scale, as a strategy for communication with eight out of twelve participants mentioned the idea. Out of those participants, one felt that meetings would not be the most appropriate way to communicate. Another participant outlined her preference of face to face meetings rather than a report form;

> I think face to face [communication]… is brilliant. You will get a certain amount of information [from the report] but you'll get more information when you are talking to somebody (Participant 6, primary teacher).

This view is in line with the literature. Brostrom (2002) found that meetings between both sectors to transfer information on children was of benefit to relationships between the two sectors. One participant (Participant 5, primary teacher) explains how a June meeting with the Early Start teacher gives her a large amount of information for each child and she can continue on from where the child is in preschool. However, challenges of meetings were also identified including the number of preschools and school there are to communicate. This challenge is supported in the literature through recognition of the little amount of non-contact time for preschool and primary school teachers (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017). While there is some non-contact time now available for both sectors (Gray & Ryan, 2016; Lyons, 2017).

Preschool and primary school visits.

The idea of both preschool and school visits by the respective teachers in an effort to smooth transition is supported in the literature (Fabian, 2013; Peters, 2002). One participant discussed the importance placed on the children visiting the primary school but felt that visits to the preschool could also be of equal benefit to the teachers.

> I do think it would be important and very beneficial for primary teachers to come in to early years settings to see what happens there, to see what takes place in a day, to see how we record development and what educational milestones children are reaching in the service. (Participant 8, preschool teacher).

Seven participants in total discussed the idea of visiting either a school or preschool to build relationships between professionals. Visits can also be the beginning of the development of relationships (Fabian, 2013; Peters, 2002).The idea of preschool and school visits present challenges too. One participant felt that visits would bring the sectors together but in reality, it would be very challenging to achieve (Participant 13). This concern is supported in the literature by Peters (2002) who found in their study was while teachers valued these visits they presented logistical difficulties for them.

The micro-level influences on communication were viewed by the participants as just as important as the macro-level influences. There were differences in opinion in school starting age and skills and dispositions needed for school and no mention of the interactionist view of readiness. Co-located preschools and Early Start settings was viewed by the participants as a facilitator of their communication while citing micro-level issues with time and workload as a barrier. Micro-level strategies were also discussed by participants with a significant focus on sharing information.

Chapter four - Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this research tell us that all participants, both preschool and primary school viewed transition as very important. When probed further on why they placed this level of importance on the transition, the consequences of a difficult transition on a child's attitude towards education and on their future schooling was the most cited reason. Attending preschool was seen in a positive light amongst the both groups of participants and viewed as a way of ensuring a successful transition.

When asked what level of importance they placed on communication all participants initially said they placed a very high level of importance on it. When probed further, preschool participants justified their answers by explaining that they valued the information they could give to the primary schools and primary school participants said it would help prepare them for the incoming children and they would be able to plan better for these children. However, there were a small minority of participants, who when asked further questions, only placed importance on communication when there is an issue or an anticipated issue either because of a child with SEN, behavioural or family problems and not on communication for every child transitioning to primary school. There was also huge significance placed on sharing information as the rationale for communication and there was no mention of how communication may be of benefit to professionals. The absence of communication is seen in the literature, this was also the view of the participants. There were some links already in place for the participants, but it would be on an ad-hoc basis and maybe in reaction to an issue with a child with SEN or behavioural issues and not done in a coordinated way. This shows that communication has not been given the status amongst professionals as it has in the literature.

The participants' views on the macro-level influences on communication were presented next. National policy was cited as a potential facilitator, barrier and strategy to improve communication. The significance participants place on national policy give us an indication of its importance in terms of leading the way for the development of communication between the sectors. The role of curriculum continuity was cited by the participants as both a facilitator and strategy and if this research is representative curriculum continuity is an important consideration for communication. The role of the recognition of the preschool sector in communication was seen as barrier and strategy for communication by the participants. Interestingly, it was not only preschool teachers who referenced the discrepancies in value and recognition and its limiting potential on communication. Differing educational contexts and their potential to limit communication were discussed by the participants. However, these were general comments about differences and specifics of which differences may limit communication was not discussed in detail. Time and workload at macro-level was also cited as a barrier to communication and the need for non-contact time to develop communication was stressed by the participants. Confidentiality and data protection was referenced mainly by the primary school participants as a barrier and it seems with the introduction of EU law there may be more challenges in terms of sharing information. Shared CPD was cited by a one preschool participant as a strategy to be introduced at macro-level to improve communication while two primary school participants viewed separate training as appropriate. If this was introduced at a national level these differences of opinion could cause difficulties.

The micro-level influences on communication was the next theme to be discussed. The participants' differing views the school readiness debate were laid out.

Differences in opinion on school starting age and the skills and dispositions needed for school may limit communication as there is a lack of shared understanding about the topic. The interactionist view and "ready schools" were not mentioned by any of the participants and they generally positioned themselves in the maturationist-environmental view of school readiness which would suggest a lack of knowledge on the topic and the need for professional development in transition. The participants who had experienced some links with each other all cited the co-location of preschools and schools to be a facilitator, a possible new finding for this research. However, the reality of having every school and preschool co-located seems like an unrealistic one. Participants thought that the amount of settings they would each have to communicate with would limit their ability to do so, removing this particular barrier may be impossible. Sharing information processes, including report forms and learning portfolios and the participants perspectives on these were presented next along with their views on joint meetings and preschool/primary school visits. Report forms were viewed as being the most straight-forward and efficient way of transferring information and were favoured equally amongst the preschool and primary participants. However, it is questionable, considering the literature, whether report forms are most appropriate to give a sense of a preschool child's learning. Joint teacher meeting to share information and preschool/school visits were viewed positively by the participants however many of the macro-level strategies would have to be introduced before micro-level ones would be possible.

While it is important to note that this is small-scale research and the findings are not generalisable they may be transferable when adapted for different contexts therefore some recommendations that can be identified.

1. The preschool sector should be funded, valued and governed in the same way as the primary sector. This does not mean the DES would need to take responsibility for the preschool sector but rather the DCYA adopt the same policies in terms of governing and resourcing the sector. This would mean the appropriate funding to enable to introduction of salaries that are reflective of the qualifications and experience of those working in the sector. Paid non-contact time for training, filling forms, meetings and parent workshops is essential.

2. While the NCCA (2016), is currently redeveloping the primary curriculum, the importance of supporting the implementation of the new structure through funding for training cannot be over-estimated. Training should be shared opportunities for both sectors to encourage communication, shared understandings and mutual respect.

3. The development of a transition policy is needed to ensure the idea of transitions and communication and collaboration between the two sectors is taken seriously and there will be some accountability. The transition policy should contain specific guidelines that outline the roles and responsibilities of each sector and expectations should be made explicit to professionals.

4. A national level transitions initiative should be introduced, similar to a pilot initiative carried out by the NCCA (2018) and should include:

   a. Shared CPD on transitions in general, the skills knowledge and dispositions needed for primary school, the importance of communication and collaboration between the two sectors and the introduction of and guidance on sharing information templates.

b. Introduction of mandatory sharing information templates that will

    have space for professionals, parents and children's voices and are

    easy to use.

c. Joint meetings between preschool and primary teachers to share

    information and in turn build respectful, reciprocal relationships.

    Parents can be included in these meetings too.

d. Time allocated for preschool/school visits so both professionals can

    become familiar with the preschool and primary environments and

    continue to build relationships.

These supports, if implemented, will benefit professionals but they will ultimately benefit the thousands of children moving from preschool settings to primary school settings each year by ensuring a smooth transition, starting them off on the right path on their educational journey.

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EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE PROCESSES OF COMMUNICATION

Appendix 1 – Letter of Consent

Dear Participant,

Firstly, thank you for taking the time to consider being a part of the research. I am currently completing Year 2 of a Masters in Education Studies (Early Childhood Education) at Marino Institute of Education [MIE]. As part of the dissertation module, I am required to carry out a small-scale research project with a group of participants.

The topic of the research is communication between the primary sector and the preschool sector at the time of children's transition to school. The aim of the research is to fully understand educator's perceptions of the processes of communication between the preschool and primary sectors, including factors that may promote or limit communication. This aim will be achieved through the qualitative research method to ensure the perceptions of educators can be deeply explored and highlighted. The research will use semi-structured interviews with both preschool teachers and primary teachers.

As a result of this project I hope to achieve a deep level of understanding of the processes of communication including. I hope that the findings from this project will inform my own professional work around the transition from preschool to primary by giving me a new understanding of communication issues. I hope to use this learning and develop lines of communication between early years services and their feeder schools.

You can participate in this project by giving approximately 30-45 minutes of our time to be interviewed. The interview will be organised at a time and location that suits you and will be carried out in a respectful manner. The interview will be audio-recorded, and recordings will be kept securely on password protected cloud software and USB

EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE PROCESSES OF COMMUNICATION

key. The data will be destroyed after 13 months of submission of the dissertation to the relevant academic examination board. Participation in the research is voluntary and you can opt out of the study any time without any penalty and your recordings will be destroyed. You will also be able to opt back in at any time. You can also refuse to answer specific questions. The opinions, thoughts and feelings that you express are your own and will not be recorded as a reflection of the organisation you work for.

Your participation in the project is kept confidential and no identifiable information will be included in the research report. Pseudonyms will be used for names of parents, children and colleagues. School/ Early Childhood Education settings and locations will not be identified in the report.

The research report will be printed and bound and submitted for marking to MIE. A copy will also be held in the MIE library for reference for other students.

Please read the consent agreements below and do not hesitate to contact me if you need any clarification. Please sign and return to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

I look forward to hearing from you.

- I…………………………………… voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that the opinions, thoughts and feelings expressed by me are my own and are not a reflection of the organisation I work for.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequences of any kind and I can also opt back in.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves a 30-45-minute semi-structured interview at a time and location that suits me.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain confidential. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation.

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that I or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in password protected cloud storage software and USB key and

will be only accessible to the researcher until 13months after the dissertation has been submitted to the relevant academic examination board.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 13 months.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Danielle Brazel, Student Master of Education Studies (MES) in Early Childhood Education

Email: dbrazelmece16@momail.mie.ie

Signature of research participant

_____   _____

Signature of participant   Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

_____   _____

Signature of researcher   Date

Thanking you for your support

EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE PROCESSES OF COMMUNICATION

Appendix 2 – Interview Schedule

Question	Probe/Prompt	Topic Covered

1. Tell me about yourself?
    Your setting?
 	
    The children who come here?		

2. How important or unimportant is transition from preschool to primary for children?	Why do you say that?	
3. Does your school/preschool have any links to the preschools/schools in the area?	Have you any first-hand experience of working with the schools/preschools? Do you know anything about the schools/preschools in your area?	
4. In your opinion, do you think communication and collaboration between the preschools and primary schools is important or are we overestimating its significance?	Very – Why? Not important – Why?	
5. From your experience would you have noticed any factors limiting communication and collaboration between the preschools and primary schools?	What the reasons? What is limiting communication?	
6. From your experience would you have noticed any factors facilitating communication and collaboration between the preschool and primary sectors?	How is it facilitated? What kinds of strategies are used?	
7. If your principal/manager came to know asking for advice on how the school/preschool should collaborate and communicate with your local preschools/schools what would you advise?	What kinds of communication and collaboration would work? How would they work? Information Sharing? What do teachers want to know/What do preschool teachers share? Meetings? How often? How would they work?	

8. If you were giving the government advice on how to encourage collaboration between the two sectors what would you tell them?	Curriculum Continuity How? Bridging the gap in contexts? Transition Policy?	
9. Is there anything else you would like to say?		

Table 1 – Sample

Participant	**Role**	**Qualification**	**Location/Setting**	**Years of Experience**
Participant 1	Preschool Teacher	Level 6	Full Day Setting	N/A
Participant 3	Junior Infant Teacher	Min Level 8	Primary with Early Start	N/A
Participant 4	Junior Infant Teacher	Min Level 8	Primary with Early Start	2 Years
Participant 5	Junior Infant Teacher	Min Level 8	DEIS Band 1 School	N/A
Participant 6	Home School Liaison Teacher	Min Level 8	DEIS Band 1 School	9 Years
Participant 7	Preschool Teacher	Level 7	Sessional preschool in disadvantaged area	10+ years
Participant 8	Preschool Teacher	Level 7	Sessional preschool co-located with school	10+ Years
Participant 9	Junior Infant Teacher	Min Level 8	Non-Deis School	N/A
Participant 10	Junior Infant Teacher	Min Level 8 (Post Grad)	Preschool with Co-located Preschool	N/A
Participant 11	Preschool Teacher	Level 8	Part time Montessori Preschool and School to 2nd class	N/A
Participant 12	Preschool Teacher	Level 8 (studying level 9)	Part time setting – non-disadvantage area	N/A
Participant 13	Preschool Teacher	Level 8	Sessional Preschool	N/A

Table 2 – Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
The Importance of Transition	1. The importance of transition success 2. The importance of preschool
The Importance of Cross-Sectoral Communication	
Macro-level Influences on Communication	1. The role of national policy in transition and communication. 2. The role of curriculum continuity in transition and communication. 3. The role of the recognition of the preschool sector in transition and communication. 4. Educational Contexts- differences between preschool and primary school 5. Time and workload at macro-level 6. Confidentiality and Data Protection 7. Macro-level strategies a. Shared CPD

Micro-Level Influences on Communication	1. Differences in educational contexts
	2. Expectations of school readiness
	    a. School starting age
	    b. Skills and dispositions needed for primary school
	    c. A new way of thinking about school readiness
	3. Co-location of preschool and primary schools
	4. Time and workload at micro-level
	5. Micro-level strategies
	    a. Sharing information processes
	    b. Joint teacher meetings
	    c. Preschool and primary school visits