Pre-school to Primary Education: Teacher Perceptions of Children’s Needs and the Influence of Aistear on Children’s Transitions

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Declaration

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Abstract
This research project, Pre-school to Primary Education: Teacher perceptions of children’s needs and the influence of Aistear on children’s transitions, is a small-scale dissertation exploring infant teachers lived experienced, attitudes and perceptions on the transition from pre-school to primary school in Ireland. This study uses a qualitative research method, having employed the use of semi-structured interviews to gather sufficient data for the research. Eight participant infant teachers were selected to be interviewed, contributing greatly to the research. Findings from the analysis of the data gathered showed there is a lack of communication between the pre-school and primary school in the transfer of information on children. The findings also suggested that core skills and dispositions such as social skills, communication skills and independence were key features of school readiness, thus ensuring a smooth transition into formal schooling. The Aistear curriculum framework proved have a significant influence in children’s transitions in terms of developing skills and dispositions and the implementation of a playful pedagogy. Finally, children commencing formal schooling at a younger age emerged as a factor inhibiting successful transitions from pre-school to primary school. This study explores the lived-experiences, beliefs and attitudes of teachers toward the transition from pre-school to primary school, while building on the current body of knowledge which already exists from previous studies.
List of Abbreviations

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>CECDE</td>
<td>Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education</td>
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<td>DEIS</td>
<td>Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools</td>
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<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
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<td>DYCA</td>
<td>Department of Children and Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>ECCE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Education</td>
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<td>INTO</td>
<td>Irish National Teachers Organisation</td>
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<td>NCCA</td>
<td>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</td>
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<td>OFSTED</td>
<td>Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills</td>
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<td>PME</td>
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<td>PSC</td>
<td>Primary school curriculum</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
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Next, I would like to thank the eight infant teachers who kindly agreed to be interviewed and contributed greatly to the study. Without their commitment and time, this research would not have been possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The transition from pre-school to primary school is recognized globally as an important developmental milestone for young children and their families (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). Theoretical work suggests that the transition from pre-school to primary school may potentially have an impact on the child’s later social and academic success, given that early experiences in school can often impact later school adjustments (Eckert et al. 2008).

Conceptual literature associated with this type of transition emphasises the change in which young children experience moving from a play-based oriented setting to a more structured formal school setting. This dissertation will explore teacher perceptions of children’s needs and the influence of Aistear on children’s transitions from pre-school to primary school. While there is a growing body of research and discussion regarding transitions, limited studies explore the perceptions of and lived experiences of infant teachers. Given the importance of transitions, this study hopes to explore the lived-experiences, beliefs and attitudes of teachers toward the transition from pre-school to primary school, while also contributing to the current area of knowledge which exists from other studies.

Rationale for the study
The researcher has chosen this topic due to a personal interest in the area of early years education in the Irish context, namely in transitions and school readiness, which stemmed from experiences during teaching practices carried out in an infant primary school as part of her Professional Masters of Education (PME) course. Despite a growing body of research, limited studies have sought to examine the real-life experiences of infant teachers, thus giving the researcher the opportunity to delve further into this area and seek perceptions and beliefs
of infant teachers on transitions from pre-school to primary education, through the use of semi-structures interviews.

**Aims of the research:**

The researcher has set out various aims and objectives which will form the basis of the research:

- To investigate teacher’s understanding of the concept of transitions and beliefs on the features of ‘school readiness’
- To explore teacher experiences and perceptions of children’s transitions from pre-school to primary education and factors that support or inhibit children’s successful transitions.
- To consider if the implementation of the Aistear curriculum framework supports children’s transition into primary education.
- To determine if, and to what extent, information is being transferred from pre-school to primary school.

**Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was employed to harvest the most suitable way to gather information through the use of semi-structured interviews. This was used to aid the researcher in grasping the “perceptions, perspectives and understandings” of primary school infant teachers on transition practices and school readiness in schools in the Irish context (Leedy and Ormrod, 2012, p.145). Therefore, eight infant teachers were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews, where qualitative data was subsequently gathered, which were then transcribed and interpreted using a thematic analysis.
Layout of Chapters

There are five chapters included in this research project. Chapter 1 presents as an introduction to the study and highlights the aims of the study and discusses the rationale for the study and chosen methodology. Chapter 2 provides a short overview of national and international literature relating to the area of the transitions from pre-school to primary school and school readiness. This includes an overview of early childhood care and education in Ireland, international perspectives on transitions and factors influencing positive transitions. Chapter 3 discusses the research approach employed in the study, including sampling and recruitment, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis and limitations to the study. Chapter 4 provides the main findings and themes which emerged from the data analysis, linking the findings to the pertinent literature in chapter 2. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the researcher’s findings, coupled with recommendations for future practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter examines and reviews the pertinent literature associated with the area of transitioning from pre-school to primary education. The researcher will firstly provide definitions of transitions and school readiness, followed by an overview of early childhood care and education in Ireland, drawing upon the influence of the free pre-school year and the Aistear framework. National and international policies on transitions from pre-school to primary school will be discussed, followed by factors which influence positive transitions such as communication between the pre-school and primary school, the age of children commencing primary school and the skills and dispositions required to ensure a smooth transition.

Defining Transitions and School Readiness

The transition from pre-school to primary school is recognised as one of the most important educational transitions a child experiences (O’Kane, 2016). Transitions should be regarded as a “process rather than an event”, suggesting that instead of concentrating on the first day of primary school, the transition process should ideally commence some time before children begin formal schooling and thus continue until the child has settled comfortably into the new school setting. (Sanders et.al, 2005, p.132). Fabian and Dunlop (2006) claim that transitions should be looked at from an ecological perspective, bearing in mind the influence of all areas in children’s lives, for example, the home, preschool or school, and the connections between these associates that occur over some time. It is understood that a successful transition from pre-school to primary school is important for children’s emotional and social well-being, coupled with their cognitive accomplishments (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). Hence, O’Kane
(2007) believes that transition practices should be established to assure smooth transitions and endurance from one setting to the other. Supporting transitions is a shared responsibility between families, pre-schools and primary schools, however, Puccioni (2018, p.254), places emphasis on the role of the parent in the transition process as “parent involvement is crucial to children’s educational success”, which suggests parental support is just as important as the child’s school educator in a successful transition. Smyth (2018, p.xi) also found that a smooth transition is “enhanced by the child having a positive relationship with their mother and having experienced more home learning activities”.

School readiness is a concept which indicates if a young child is ready to commence formal schooling and, is associated closely with the transition process. School readiness has gained popularity around the globe “strategy to close the learning gap and improve equity in achieving lifelong learning and full developmental potential among young children” (UNICEF, 2012, p.4). However, O’Kane (2007) affirms that the issue of whether children are ready for school is intricate and can be deemed as quarrelsome. According to a report on school readiness issued by UNICEF (2012), concerns related to school readiness reflect on the children’s family’s readiness for school coupled with primary school’s readiness for the children. Similarly, Ackerman, Barnett and Bernstein (2019) propose that areas which include family, previous social experiences in pre-school and the child’s characteristics are likely to influence a child’s school readiness. Indicators for school readiness relate to skills and dispositions acquired by the child before starting primary school such as language and literacy skills, classroom behaviour, self-help skills, and social and emotional skills (O’Kane, 2016). Similarly, school readiness for Booth and Crouter (2008) is defined in terms of a child having the necessary language skills, social, emotional and behavioural dispositions to engage with formal learning. However, in a study carried out by Smyth (2018) in the area of
transitions, there was a general consensus among infant teachers and pre-school educators that English language communication skills was highly important for school readiness. Research in the area of school readiness suggests that skills and dispositions are crucial to whether a child is ready to commence formal schooling or is ‘school ready’.

**Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland**

‘Early childhood’ is a term which is recognised globally as a distinct era in a child’s life and, within the Irish context, refers to the period from birth to six years (Mhic Mhathuna et al., 2017). Pre-primary education in Ireland is optional, with early childhood education and care services usually delivered outside of the formal education system, in the form of pre-schools, creches, day care services and nurseries (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2019). Government investment in such provisions are principally enforced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). In this regard, the Department of Education and Skills has worked closely with the DCYA and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to produce the Síolta and Aistear frameworks for early education (DES, 2019).

An examination of the history of Irish childcare indicates that prior to the 1990s, most childcare provisions were implemented by Health Boards (Government of Ireland, 1991). Consequently, in 1999, an important implication of the ‘Ready to Learn’ White Paper Report on early childhood education was the formation of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) (DES, 1999). The work carried out by the CECDE to establish an effective framework for early education brought about the publication of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood education, Síolta, in 2006 (CECDE, 2006). This framework was a forerunner to the framework which is now in place for early education; Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. (NCCA, 2009).
A universal free pre-school year was introduced in January 2010 under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme with the aim of providing a free year of early childhood care and education for all children aged between three and four and a half years, regardless of the ability to pay and family income (McGinnity, Russell & Murray, 2015). A supplemental year of free pre-school education was declared in the 2015 Government budget, which took effect in September 2016 and children who fall under the appropriate age bracket are entitled to two full academic years on the ECCE scheme. Young children traditionally attend pre-school for fifteen hours a week stretched out over 38 weeks per year, in accordance with school terms (McGinnity et.al, 2015). Children who avail of this service are “more likely to be ready for school and a formal learning and social environment” (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2009, p.2). In 2018/19, 108,204 children were reported to have participated in the ECCE programme (Pobal, 2019).

The Aistear curriculum framework

The Aistear Framework, which is the curriculum framework for the first six years of children’s lives, facilitates the transition between pre-school and primary school (Smyth, 2018). The framework was published in 2009 and supports the development of children and delivers high-quality early education experiences, which in turn, gives children the best possible start in their lifelong journey in learning and personal achievements. A focal point for the educators, parents and other agencies involved with young children is to help to ensure a smooth and easy transition between both settings, the pre-school and primary school (NCCA, 2009). Aistear is transferable through all early childhood settings to enhance children’s learning experiences and supports their progression in learning from birth to infant classes in school (O’Kane, 2016).
Aistear promotes continuity of learning from pre-school to primary school over the transition under its four themes (Smyth, 2018). The framework seeks to develop areas such as “dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding” which are highly important for children in their early years (NCCA, 2009, p.6). Research in the Irish context has suggested that the types of learning mentioned above, particularly skills and dispositions, are highly important in the transition process and promote school readiness in a child, which will be discussed in further sections. In the context of an infant classroom, Aistear presents playful learning activities and experiences, which are teacher and child led throughout the day. The four themes included in Aistear are ‘Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking’ (NCCA, 2009). Each theme supports and facilitates the development of important skills and dispositions in child led play-based learning. Language skills, communication skills and independent skills such as decision making are just some of the skills in which children acquire during Aistear (NCCA, 2009, p.6).

Play is critical for the social, emotional, physical and cognitive well-being of children (Ginsburg, 2007). More recently, the benefits of a play-based curriculum and the principles of Aistear have been acknowledged in relation to primary schooling. Due to emerging research on teaching and learning, coupled with new insights into young children’s learning experiences, the NCCA has been asked to add new content to the primary curriculum which in turn, will promote better curriculum continuity across all stages in the education system in Ireland, from early childhood to the senior cycle (NCCA,2018). Gray and Ryan (2016) place a distinct contrast between both the primary school curriculum (PSC) and Aistear, that while the PSC puts emphasis on knowledge and skills, Aistear places more of emphasis on the
development of dispositions. This resonates with the Aistear Síolta practice guide, which stresses the importance of learning dispositions (NCCA, 2015).

**Age commencing school**

The compulsory age for a child to attend primary school is six years, although the majority of children in Ireland can be enrolled in a primary school at the age of four years (O’Kane & Hayes, 2013). With the introduction of the second free pre-school year in 2016, came a change in the age requirement for children attending pre-school. The age limit for free pre-school education changed from 4 years and 7 months, to 5 years and 5 months, which would suggest that, generally speaking, most children who avail of the free pre-school education would be 5 or 6 years old starting primary school, however, this is not particularly the case in Ireland (Department of Children Youth and Affairs, 2019). Baber (2016) has argued that starting formal school earlier than the age of seven years of age is not academically or socially beneficial in the long run. According to Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, children’s thinking process goes through various transitions or stages from birth to eleven years, which would suggest that children beginning formal schooling at a particularly younger age may not have the cognitive ability to make sense of, or understand, specific things in a specific way before a particular age (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). Dr. Carmel Brennan, in an article for the Irish Times newspaper, expressed that we should not rush younger children into formal schooling as “They are in the process of finding out who they are and we don’t want to start disciplining their minds too early…” (Wayman, 2017). Similarly, Black, Devereux & Salvanes (2008, p.5), in their study “Too Young to Leave the Nest? The Effects of School Starting Age”, highlight some disadvantages regarding the early starting age in primary education. “It is possible that children cannot learn as well in school
earlier in their developmental life”. It would seem, from a review of the literature, that there can be negative implications associated with a child beginning school at a very young age.

**International Perspectives on Transitions**

Ireland is not the only country to acknowledge and consider the importance and value of positive transitions. The U.K is a notable model of good practice in the area of transitions. An example of this can be seen in the report ‘A smooth transition, the Village Nursery’ published by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted), detailing the great work carried out by British pre-school educators during children’s transitions. The report highlights the communication pre-school educators have with parents and schools, between sending letters to parents about the child’s transition and what supports are in place for the child, making use of transition statements or a ‘learning summary’ of each child, and arranging for children ‘and their key worker to visit the school (Ofsted, 2014, p.4). This differs immensely to policy in the Irish context, particularly in the area of communication between all stakeholders, as researchers have identified a gap in the transfer of information.

In Sweden, the ‘pre-school class’ was established in 1998 to help young children during their transition from pre-school to primary school (Milopoulou, 2018). It is a transition class in which young children can attend for a year until they turn six and start formal schooling. It is viewed as neither a school nor pre-school setting, however, does involves playful activities, while also preparing children for formal schooling. Educators in this setting work “to achieve the outcome of a smooth transition for children from preschool to the primary school” (Milopoulou, 2018, p.3.). This pre-school class mirrors the aims of pre-school settings in the Irish context, both involving playful learning and the preparation for primary school.
Australia has led extensive research on supporting transitions in recent years (Skouteris, Watson & Lum, 2012). Queensland has developed a specific Transition Statement to support the child through their transition, which are written in collaboration with the parent of the child, the child themselves and Kindergarten staff, as opposed to solely pre-school educators in the Irish context (O’Kane & Murphy, 2016). The Statements reflects the five developmental themes identified in the Victorian Early Years Learning Framework; Identity, Community, Wellbeing, Learning and Communication, three of which reflect the themes in the Aistear curriculum framework in Ireland; Well-being, Communicating and Identity and Belonging (NCCA, 2009). Skouteris, Watson and Lum (2012) found that the Statement takes a strength-based approach, focusing on what works best for the child in terms of skill and dispositions, motivations and interests.

New Zealand has introduced a number of initiatives in recent years with an aim of enhancing collaboration between pre-schools and primary schools and to improve continuity in children’s learning (Peters et al., 2009). Similarly, to transition statements, New Zealand use portfolios to document and assess children’s learning. Included in the portfolios are detailed narratives of children’s learning as they “allow the child’s voice to be heard in a meaningful way as they make the transition to primary school” (O’Kane & Murphy, 2016, p.7.) Children attend pre-school for 20 hours a week from their first birthday to the day they begin formal schooling (Peter et al., 2009). This is quite a difference from the Irish context in regard to hours of service a week and age. As discussed previously, Ireland provides free pre-school education for 15 hours a week for children aged 2 years and 8 months to 5 years and 5 months (McGinnity et.al, 2015).
Despite the extensive and much welcomed strides Ireland has made in the past decade in the provision of free early years education, perhaps we can be influenced by our European and global counterparts on the establishment of a more sustained and robust early years education system for children, from the initial transition of a child’s care outside of the home, to that of their entry to primary school.

**Communication and Information Sharing**

Information sharing between pre-schools and primary schools “is an important way of supporting children making this transition” (O’Kane & Murphy, 2016, p.5). Transition Statements include information based on “the child’s learning throughout the pre-school year in a variety of learning contexts through day-to-day activities, conversations, observations and interactions” (Donegal County Childcare Committee, 2011). Although there is no national policy with regard to the transfer of information on educational transitions in Ireland, they are highly informative for the teacher and parent (O’Kane & Hayes, 2013). The Statements provide a transfer of information on the child, comprising of their personal interests, skills, knowledge and learning dispositions, which in turn assists primary schools in supporting the learning needs of young children in the infant classroom (Donegal County Childcare Committee, 2011). The NCCA has worked closely with pre-schools and primary schools in the development of Mo Scéal: *Moving from Preschool to Primary* templates, which is a resource used to collaborate with pre-schools in supporting children and their families during the transition from pre-school to primary school, providing information on the child’s learning and development (NCCA, 2019). However, it has become evident from research in the Irish context however, that there is a noticeable gap in the transfer of information between pre-schools and primary schools (Smyth, 2018). Brostorm (2002) too found this gap of information evident during his research on the communication between
both settings. This would perhaps suggest a lack of communication between both settings, which will be explored further in the coming chapters.

**Skills and dispositions**

Tuning into children’s skills and dispositions can support effective transitions. Skills refer to “the ability to do something well” and dispositions are regarded as “the natural qualities of a person’s character” (Oxford dictionary, 2020). Research conducted in the Irish context has suggested that children should acquire core skills and dispositions to ensure a smooth transition from pre-school to primary school. One of the aims of pre-school education is to equip children with the skills and dispositions for successful learning and for life (O’Kane, 2016). O’Kane also (2016) affirms that positive learning dispositions such as independence, self-help skills and curiosity are extremely beneficial in the process, while less emphasis should be placed on academic skills. Similarly, Smyth (2018) also concluded from her research that pre-academic skills were of lesser importance over other skills such as communication, social and emotional skills (Smyth, 2018). Pucioni (2018, p.251) believes that “physical, intellectual, and social skills” are necessary for the child to successfully fulfil a smooth transition. Fabian and Dunlop (2006, p.7) have reported that caring relationships with teachers can promote and support the development of skills in areas such as “self-esteem, self-efficacy, autonomy and optimism”. O’Kane (2016, p.42) has also stated that fostering and maintaining friendships also improves children’s long-term educational outcomes; “Children who worked co-operatively and related well to their peers, who handled their emotions well and were better at problem-solving, were more likely to be successful in later life”. The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (2015) has however, stated that dispositions can “be positive or negative”. Negative dispositions often involve a heavy reliance on adults to
complete tasks for children and create a sense of ‘learned helplessness’ (NCCA, 2015, p.2). Therefore, the practice guide found that independent skills, encouraged by adults were highly important, as well as self-regulation skills and problem-solving (NCCA, 2015).

**Conclusion**

Upon reviewing the literature associated with this area transitions from pre-school to primary school, it became apparent that despite research and commentary in this area, few studies have explored the experiences of primary school teachers. The literature highlighted the importance of the transitions from pre-school to primary school. However, current understandings suggest there is a notable gap in communication and the transfer of information between the pre-school and primary school. Key skills and dispositions became prominent in the literature, highlighting the importance of their acquisition before coming to primary school, to ensure a smooth transition between both settings. Finally, it became evident these key skills are embedded in Aistear, thus signifying the framework’s importance in the child’s transition.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will provide a description of the chosen methodology of research employed by the researcher during this study. The method used will be discussed and delineated, together with a rationalization for its selection. The research carried out was that of a qualitative nature and used a thematic analysis. Consideration for another methodological instrument will be deliberated, as well as areas such as ethical consideration, sampling, data collection, piloting and data analysis. By way of conclusion, reflexivity and limitations within the research will be examined.

Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research methods help in gaining intuition into the processes associated in “co-constructions of meaning, lived experiences, cultural rituals, and oppressive practices” (Atkinson, 2017, p.65). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2012), there are many advantages to qualitative research which typically serve a purpose of verification. This allows the researcher to test the validity of a number of assumptions or claims within different contexts and formulate new theories (Williams, 2007). Qualitative methods including interviews and focus groups, have a promising potential to play essential roles for all academic achievements “in terms of the formulation of questions, building operational definitions, and designing research instruments” (Atkinson, 2017, p.66). Qualitative research was therefore considered suitable to analyse and explore the perceptions of infant teachers on the phenomena of transitioning from pre-school to primary school in the Irish context for the purpose of this study. Semi-structured interviews were employed by the
researcher, which in turn, administered opportunities to question and probe eight participant interviewees on their lived experiences and attitudes toward this subject area.

**Consideration for other research method**

There was some consideration given to adopting a quantitative approach to this study at the beginning of the research. This would have been employed through the form of questionnaires, however, a quantitative approach would cease to constitute “one on one conversations between the researcher and participant” (Atkinson, 2017, p.69). Questionnaires yield objective and concise data that could be efficiently measured through the use of interviews, by gathering valuable data on the participants experiences face to face. Moreover, interviews permit the researcher to be attentive to aspects of the conversation such as pauses, different cues in expressions and occasional divert of conversational topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). Certainly, this would not have been achievable in a quantitative method of research, particularly in this research project, considering the limited number of teachers who participated. According to McNeill and Chapman (2005), qualitative research positively differs from quantitative research, as it focuses on presenting the quality of what is being described by the interviewee, rather than simply presenting statistics during data gathering. A quantitative approach in this study would have struggled to seek efficacy.

**Ethical considerations**

Research ethics approval was needed and thus granted by Marino Institute of Education to proceed with data collection. Simons (2009) stresses the importance of establishing good relationships with participants of research, where participants can trust the researcher. Therefore, all participants involved were given a letter of consent, highlighting the nature of the study. The letter was also given to both principals of the participants’ schools, clarifying
the research that was being carried out with their staff, and assuring confidentiality to the
teacher participants and of course, the school itself (see appendix 2). In comprising the
questions for the interviews, consideration was given to the protection of the participants’
identity, taking into consideration “the effects of the research on participants”, thus acting ‘in
a way as to preserve their dignity’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p.84).

**Sampling and Recruitment**

As this study was small-scale in nature, it was important to select a sample that was adequate
to the distinctive needs of the research. Therefore, snowball sampling was utilised in this
study which “involves the respondent telling the researcher who the next respondent might
be” (Thomas 2009, p.104.). Similarly, Atkinson and Flint (2001, p.1) acknowledge snowball
sampling as a ‘technique for finding research subjects’ Three teachers from two different
schools were well known to the researcher prior to commencing the research and suggested
other infant teachers who might be interested in participating in the research. These
participants were chosen at the very beginning of the research, as it is important that
“researchers must take sampling decisions early in the overall planning of a piece of
research” (Cohen et al., 2007, p.100.) The researcher selected a sample of eight infant
teachers, all with a minimum of 3 years teaching infants, some of whom had over twenty
years teaching experience, including a school principal. Each participant was granted
anonymity and were assured that all data gathered would be used only for the purpose of this
research project, before consenting to take part.

**Data Collection**

The researcher conducted interviews across three primary schools in the north of Dublin.
Eight participants agreed to be interviewed for the purpose of this study. The purpose of an
The interview is to test or develop hypotheses and to gather data. They are in contrast to an everyday conversation, having a specific purpose and is often question-based, with the questions asked by an interviewer (Cohen et al., 2007). While conducting the interviews, the researcher was aware of the need to eradicate a bias opinion. In doing so, the manner of the questions asked was taken into consideration, the characteristics of the participants and more importantly, the characteristics the researcher possessed as an interviewer, as expressed in Cohen et.al (2007) ‘Research Methods in Education’.

The questions used in the interviews were composed with influence from the literature and the researchers over all aims for the project. With consent from the participants, seven of the eight interviews were recorded using a recording device. Short or subsidiary questions were also prepared as a strategy to redirect participants should they go off topic, or “occasional side-tracks” in conversation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012, p.145). The recordings expedited the progression of questioning, where the researcher was able to record pauses in conversations for thoughts and reflection of the participants, while they were considering different aspects of the questions asked. Every interview conducted was successfully transcribed.

**Piloting**

Pilot studies are commonly administered to test the use and efficiency of research tools in qualitative research studies (Malmqvist et al., 2019). According to Sarantakos (2013, p.275.), pilot studies are “a small-scale replica and rehearsal of the main study”. Leedy and Ormrod (2012) affirm that a pilot study is a great way to dictate the practicality and feasibility of a research project, so that the researcher can make changes in areas of weakness, ambiguities inadequacies, before the real research begins. Therefore, pilot studies where carried out by the researcher with a friend and infant teacher to examine the methodological instrument
before beginning the interviews. This proved successful as the researcher was able identify some flaws in the wording, structure and layout of the questions. Accordingly, the researcher was able to make small changes to the layout and questions being asked, thus establishing a better structure to the interview. Only when the process of each interview was completed, was the researcher able to validate and interpret the findings of the interviews by transcribing each one.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was accomplished by using the phases of thematic data analysis, as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). This gave the researcher the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the data gathered, and, to conduct “a rigorous and relevant thematic analysis” (Nowell et al., 2017, p.1.). Firstly, the researcher re-listened to audio recordings taken from the interviews before transcribing them. The coding of features and comments that were of relevance to each question from the transcriptions were subsequently conducted. Comments were then assembled into suggested themes, before further analysing the data through secondary coding to finalize the three emergent themes. These steps were necessary in analysing the data, from which the themes emerged.

Limitations in the research

The findings in this study cannot be assumed to be in the context of a whole population, however, it does provide some perspectives and understandings into the area of transitions from pre-school to primary school. As this study was a small research project which was completed in a relatively short period of time, the researcher does acknowledge that there were limitations in the study. Furthermore, there was a small number of eight participating infant teachers, and the findings were limited to two areas in Dublin, three primary schools in
northern area. According to Almeida et. al (2017, p.378), with most research projects comes “some limitations and pitfall”, and, time sensitivity is also a factor contributing to these limitations. Therefore, the data collected by the researcher cannot be generalized as the perspective of one whole community.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is seen as a crucial aspect in conducting research (Marshall & Miles, 2011). The researcher was the fundamental instrument in the gathering of data and its analysis. It relates to the “analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research” (Palaganas et al., 2017, p.427). During this study, reflectivity took place in the form of a personal research diary comprised of observations and handwritten notes kept throughout the process, which the researcher frequently added to and returned to as the research progressed. This worked well as a means of self-reflection for the researcher.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the research methodology employed to this study. It rationalized and discussed the selection of qualitative research and the consideration for another research method. Furthermore, ethical approval was acknowledged, the type of sampling chosen was explored, as well as data collection, piloting, data analysis, limitations and finally, reflexivity.
Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

Introduction

This chapter will analyse and discuss the main findings of the data gathered during this study. The researcher used a thematic during the analysis, using the necessary steps as set out by Clarke and Braun’s (2006) to analyse the gathered data. The aim of this research project was to explore the perceptions of infant teachers on the transition from pre-school to primary school with regard to children’s needs and the influence of Aistear on the transitional process. During the analysis and coding of the data collected from transcribed interviews, four major themes emerged from the data gathered. These included:

- Communication
- Skills and dispositions
- Aistear’s influence on the transition
- Age starting school

Each theme will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

Participants

The most practical way for the researcher to gather appropriate data was by conducting semi-structured interviews, where eight participating infant primary school teachers were interviewed to aid the research. Interviewees included six female and two male teachers. This, perhaps, can be seen as defying the concept of gender imbalance which exists amidst Irish infant primary school teachers today (Walshe & Healy-Magwa, 2015).
Each participant presented as a current infant primary-school teacher or had years of experience teaching infants. Some had experience teaching infants before the introduction of the free pre-school year in Ireland, and others qualified after the introduction. To protect the identity of each participant, pseudonyms were used. The table below, provides some information on those who participated in the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Number of years teaching</th>
<th>Number of years teaching infants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The research took place during lunch breaks in one school, however, due to the outbreak of
the Covid 19 pandemic and closure of schools, the remaining participants were interviewed
over a phone call, and one participant presented a written interview. According to
Glogowska, Young and Lockyer (2010, p.18.) “conducting interviews over the telephone is
an increasingly utilised method of collecting”. Similarly, Lechuga (2012, p.251.) affirms that
telephone interviews provide “the necessary data points to make meaning of particular
cultural phenomena”. Although the researcher and three participants did not come face to
face, the telephone interviews still allowed for the gathering of substantial data that was used
to aid the research.

**Theme 1: Communication**

**Information Sharing**
A common theme which emerged from the data gathered was the communication between
pre-school educators and infant teachers. The issue of the transfer of information between
both settings and the overall relationship between pre-schools and primary schools took up a
significant part of the interviews. Recent studies in this area of research has suggested that
there is a noticeable gap in the transfer of this information between pre-schools and primary
schools (Smyth, 2018). This would suggest a lack of communication between both settings,
which became evident in the analysis of the data.

When asked about information sharing and the use of transition statements, there was general
consensus among participants that communication between both settings was quite poor.
Kate said that “Some pre-schools will give us transition statements. It's not a widespread,
unfortunately”.
John mentioned that he hadn’t “received one before…actually, maybe once but it was pretty
vague”.
Fiona, Johns colleague, when asked if her school made use of transition statements admitted in short “No, we haven’t used this”, which would suggest a lack of familiarity with the concept of the statements.

Jane was also under the impression that her school did not receive them, “No, not to my knowledge we don’t. Well this is my third year with infants and I never received one”.

However, Mary was the sole participant who acknowledged that her school has frequent communication with pre-school stating: “…we have close collaboration with the pre-school teachers and their transition statements would be basically a summary of the skills the child has acquire and any areas that they need further development and further assistance on from their speech and language, fine motor and gross motor skills, their play development, different things like that”.

It is clear that the transfer of information in this particular school has “moved beyond these areas [the child’s skills] and also considered aspects of learning and development such as left/right-handedness, knowledge of the world, creative development” (O’Kane & Murphy, 2016, p.7). Nevertheless, this is in direct contrast to what other participants have said on the matter, who suggested that there is no real contact between both settings. Without this transferred statement or portfolio of the child, infant teachers may not have any knowledge of the children coming into their class and how best to support them during their transition from pre-school to primary school. Information on the child may therefore be restricted to vague information given on enrolment forms.

**Lack of a professional relationship**

For the researcher, there was a general feeling of, not only detachment in information provided by pre-schools, but a disconnect between infant teachers and pre-school educators.
For example, Jennifer claimed that although her school does not generally receive transition statements, a colleague did however, receive one this year and describes the information provided as “kind of a bit much”, in that the pre-school was attempting to diagnose a child with dyslexia, which Jennifer claimed is “definitely way too soon to make any calls like that.”

At age 5 or 6, children are still learning to decode, blend and develop their phonological awareness and skills. Therefore, as stated on the National Centre on Improving Literacy website, there are a number of false diagnosis in children under the age of 6 years who are being diagnosed with dyslexia (Compton, 2020).

Jennifer also expressed displeasure with the ‘overlap’ that seems to occur when pre-school educators begin academic work which should ideally commence in junior infants, such as handwriting and the Jolly Phonics programme. As a consequence, bad habits develop such as poor letter formation, for example, and is “quite hard to go back and get rid of bad habits like that”. The Irish Teachers’ Journal (INTO) (2018, p.15) acknowledges this overlap, and states that it has “served only to highlight the gap that had opened up in what was considered best practice for early years education”.

John also admitted that “…overall there’s not much communication or kind of relationship between pre-schools and my school”.

**Conclusions from other research**

As previously explored in chapter 2 in the review of the literature, it is evident from the data gathered that there is a lack of information transferred from pre-school to primary school during the child’s transition. Broström (2000, p.4) also found this gap of information evident during his research on the communication between both settings, “there is a lack of communication between kindergarten teachers and teachers from kindergarten class in the
period leading up to children’s transition”. Smyth, in her research into the area of transitions (2018), came to a similar conclusion when she surveyed primary school teachers on what kinds of information was offered to them in regard to incoming children. She concluded, similarly to the researcher that “an information gap was evident regarding the child’s individual strengths and challenges and the skills developed in preschool” (Smyth, 2018, p.38). Peters et al. (2009, p.4) stress the importance of communication between both settings as it is vital for “teachers to be aware of what happens in each other’s settings”. There is certainly an importance surrounding information sharing and communication, not only between the pre-school and primary school, but other agencies who could be involved with the child, for example parents. What was interesting was that not one participant mentioned the importance of parental involvement in the communication process between the pre-school and primary school.

To refer back to the aims of the research set out in chapter 1, the researcher sought to determine if and to what extent information is being transferred between both settings. In the context of this particular emergent theme, it appeared obvious that there is very little information shared and therefore a lack of communication between both settings.

**Theme 2: Skills and dispositions**

**Overview of important skills and dispositions**

Another theme evident from the analysis of the data was the skills and dispositions needed to ensure a smooth transition for children. There appeared to be a strong agreement between participants on these skills and dispositions which included; social skills, independence and communication skills. Social skills were the most prominent under this theme, mentioned in all eight interviews. Independence followed in six of the eight interviews and finally,
communication skills were evident in three of the eight interviews, all of which are deemed as necessary for a smooth transition, according to Mhic Mhathuna et al (2017).

Jill explained how children’s “social ability, their emotional ability and their language and ability to communicate and just basic hygiene skills” are necessary during the child’s transition.

Similarly, Jane explained how “social skills is important especially for making friends like turn taking and sharing, things like that”.

Sean expressed the importance of “…independence and communication skills, such as being able to put their hand up and ask for help or being able to express that they have a problem or are in distress over something, and things like putting their coats on without assistance”, are of benefit to the child during the transition.

**Academic Readiness**

There also seemed to be a general consensus that pre-academic skills were not a necessity.

John claimed, “I will say that I wouldn’t expect children coming to Junior Infants to have, you know, reading and writing skills…”.

Jennifer found that “…it's mostly about you know, being socially and emotionally ready I think it’s not a focus on the academic”.

Kate implied that she also has no expectation for academic skills during the transition process as she would “do a lot of pre- reading and pre-writing exercises before we even start reading or writing”.

This links to Smyth’s research (2018) in the area of transitions, where she too asserts that pre-academic skills are seen as less important than other skills. Similarly, Mhic Mhathuna et. al (2017, p.7) in their research of school readiness, found that teachers “did not agree with the emphasis placed on pre-academic skills in early years settings and in the home”.


Social Skills

The findings in this section reflect the skills and dispositions identified by O’Kane (2007) as being crucial to children beginning primary school. These skills, which the child should likely possess upon entering Junior infants included social skills; being able to “form relationships and friendships, being able to deal with different social situations..”, as Kate expressed, which resonates with Fabian and Dunlop’s belief that caring relationships and friendships are necessary in the child’s development and transitional period (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). Similarly, for Smyth (2018, p.34) social skills were seen as essential, involving “taking turns/sharing, being sensitive to other children’s feelings and not being disruptive of the class”. Social skills are important for “relationship building, friendship skills, sharing and turntaking, managing their behaviour”, according to O’Kane (2016, p.43)

Independence

Independence is noted as an important learning disposition in the Aistear Síolta practice guide (2015). Participants described children having independence as being able to carry out simple tasks for themselves; “putting on their own coat, hanging it up, organizing their lunch box, pencil case…minding things like personal belongings”, which mirrors O’Kane & Hayes (2007, p.132.) concept of independent being “self-sufficient in taking care of oneself and ones property within the classroom situation”. In correspondence to this are Sanders et. al (2005, p. 73), where independent “meant children being able to care for themselves without relying on adult help”. In similar fashion, O’Kane describes children having independence as having an influence on areas such as decision making, responsibility and self-help skills (O’Kane, 2016).
Communication Skills

Communication skills were regarded by Sean as “being able to put their hand up and ask for help or being able to express that they have a problem or are in distress over something”. Similarly, Mhic Mhathuna et al. (2017, p.117) describe communication skills as crucial “for children to be able to express their needs”. If the child has not acquired substantial communication skills, this could potentially lead to a barrier in making friends and fostering relationships with adults (Girard et al., 2017). O’Kane and Hayes (2007, p.132) have found that “communication and language skills are closely linked with literacy skills”. The Aistear curriculum framework stresses the importance of communication and language as “communication helps children learn to think about and make sense of their world” (NCCA,2009, p.12).

Skills and dispositions as a theme presented as being a key feature of school readiness, which the researcher aimed to investigate at the beginning of the research. All participants generally agreed that the acquisition of core skills and dispositions such as social skills, independence and communication skills influences school readiness, thus making the transition from pre-school to primary school easier on the child. What is important to note, the skills and dispositions mentioned are embedded in Aistear and can be further developed in the framework during the child’s transition.

Theme 3: Aistear’s influence on the transition

Resources available to support transitions

The third theme which emerged was the influence of Aistear on children’s transition from pre-school to primary school. There seemed to be a general consensus among participants that Aistear had a positive influence on the transition from pre-school to primary school. Although there is no national policy on transition in Ireland, two practice frameworks,
Aistear and Síolta both impact and influence practice in both settings (O’Kane, 2016). Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the NCCA has also published ‘Mo Scéal’, an online document which provides materials to support children in their transition from pre-school to primary school. In the context of this study, the implementation of Aistear proved to be the most efficient and influential framework in supporting children’s transitions. It describes the types of learning that are important for children in their early years, which include skills and dispositions, which links with theme 2, values and attitudes, while offering ideas and suggestions on how this learning could be nurtured through play (NCCA, 2009).

**Responses**

When participants were asked if Aistear has had a positive influence and outcome in helping children transition from pre-school to primary school, each participant agreed. Jill was quick to answer, “Absolutely, without question. It’s probably the most beneficial, certainly the most beneficial framework that’s been put in place in the last decade”.

Kate put emphasis on the theme of communication in Aistear, giving praise to its positive influence on developing oral language, particularly for children who may not have English as their first language making the transition, “…we have found it very successful in our school because we have found in the past that some children would not have great oral language skills, like EAL children, so it has really built up those oral language skills”.

Mary based Aistear’s success and influence on transitions in the context of a continuation of the framework from pre-school to primary school. She expressed how Aistear is a “huge success in our school and it is a great follow on from the Aistear and Síolta frameworks that’s taking place in the pre-schools… I think it’s very important that the play-based curriculum that’s so well taught at pre-school level continues into primary school.”.
Fiona and John emphasized the playful learning aspect of Aistear. Fiona felt that Aistear “has a positive influence for children it allows them to mix with their class using their natural medium which is play which in turn build relationships and friendships helping them settle into school life. Play is crucial to a child’s learning and over all development”.

John deemed Aistear as having a positive influence in helping the children “who didn’t go to playschool come out of their shell and take the lead in their play and you know, just make friends and made them happier in school during their transition because play it’s what they know and what they love”. Both perspectives resonate with Kernan (2007), who places a distinct emphasis on the importance of play in the child’s learning and development.

**Result**

The researcher has determined through the gathering of data under this theme, that the implementation of the Aistear framework supports children’s transitions from pre-school to primary school, greatly. This playful approach to learning in junior classes in primary school is an important outcome in the transition, as children experience continuity from one setting to another. It was clear that most participants valued the implementation of the framework in their classroom, with three of the eight participants stating that playful learning “paves the way for future learning in older classes”. This resonates with Gray and Ryan’s ‘Aistear vis-à-vis the Primary Curriculum: the experiences of early years teachers in Ireland’ (2016, p.195), where they found that the teachers who participated in their research also valued playful learning in the sense “that it lays the foundations for future learning”. O’Kane (2016) has also commended Aistear’s methodology of play in infant classrooms, that it supports primary schools in becoming more ‘ready schools’, thus meeting the needs of each child as they make their transition from pre-school to primary school.
From the success of a continued framework, to the aspect of child-lead play and development skills and dispositions, Aistear certainly support children during the transitional process.

**Theme 4: Age starting school**

**Teacher’s responses**

A final theme which emerged from the data analysis was the age of children starting school. Although there were no direct questions asked in regard to the age, the majority of participants agreed that children starting school at a younger age proved to be a challenge for infant teachers, thus inhibiting successful transitions. As mentioned in Chapter 2 in the review of the literature, children younger than the required six years are starting formal schooling in Ireland, some as young as four years. Whilst analysing the data gathered from the transcribed interviews, it became evident that age presented as a challenge for teachers during children’s transitions, impacting signs of school readiness and inhibiting a successful transition.

For Jill, “the younger children are, the harder the transition is for us to work with…I would find that child will kind of always tend to be trying to catch up”. Mary confirmed that age impacted school readiness and further posed the questions “Is it wise to have children who are 4 on the 1st of September in a classroom? Is it fair on them with the expectations of participating in a junior infant day which is very hard if they have peers in their class who could be five and a half?”.

John believed that “…if a child is starting school under the age of 6, they’re not ready for school” and that there is a “…lack of maturity and lack of general readiness in younger children coming into junior infants”. Baber (2016) makes a similar argument, that children under the age of seven are too young to begin formal schooling.
Jane, who also listed age as a challenge during the child’s transition, affirms that younger children in junior infants “aren’t as able academically… like they find it harder to learn in school, and they’re not as emotionally or socially prepared for school as say, the older children”. Black, Devereux & Salvanes (2008,) confirm this train of thought where they express that children starting formal schooling at a younger age cannot learn as well due to their age.

**Age as a challenge for children**

Taking the findings into consideration, it is important to recognize that age may also be a challenge for the child. Referring back to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, it suggests that children beginning primary school at a particularly younger age may not have the cognitive ability to make sense of, or understand their new environment, thus leading to emotional distress, making the transition significantly harder on all parties involved, most notably the child, teacher and parent (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). An interesting point was made at the end of an interview by a participant stating, “perhaps we need to think a little bit more about whether our school could be more prepared for the child, and whether our expectations in junior infants are realistic and are they fair for the child?”. This would support UNICEF’s report on school readiness (2012, p.6) as “a school’s readiness for children” is stressed as highly important.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided a discussion on the findings evident from the analysis of the data. Relevant literature was linked to support, differ and resonate with each of the four major themes which emerged from the data. These include, communication, skills and dispositions, Aistear’s influence on the transition and the age of children starting school. The findings therefore addressed the aims of the research in terms of features of school readiness, factors
that support or inhibit children’s transitions, to what extent information is being transferred from pre-school to primary school and if the implementation of Aistear has supported children’s transitions. Chapter 5 will conclude the research project, while also presenting recommendations based on the findings.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

The overall aim of this research project was to explore infant teacher’s perceptions of children’s needs and the influence of Aistear on children’s transitions from pre-school to primary education. While this study resonates with research from previous studies in the area of transitions, it differed by seeking infant teacher’s lived experiences and perceptions on the transition from pre-school to primary school. The study employed a qualitative methodology using semi structured interviews to gather relevant data. Based on the findings in the research, four major themes emerged.

Summary of main findings

The findings in chapter 4 addressed the aims set out in the study, which formed the basis of the research. The findings suggested that there is a lack of communication between pre-school educators and infant teachers. This includes a notable gap in the transfer of information on the child during their transition. The findings also indicated that skills and dispositions are a notable feature of school readiness. Core skills and dispositions acquired by children to ensure a smooth transition included social skills, communication skills and independence as a disposition. Aistear also proved to have a significant influence in
supporting children’s transitions and finally, children starting school at a younger age inhibits successful transitions.

**Future Research**

Although this study was a small-scale dissertation carried out over a short period of time, the researcher concluded that it may be beneficial for future research to seek perspectives and obtain information from pre-school educators or external agencies working with early years settings, to garner a more in depth view of the perceptions and opinions on the transition from pre-school to primary school. What was absent from this study, and, is worth noting from the analysis of the data, was that participants ceased to mention the importance of the role of the parent in the transitional process in area such between communication with both settings and supporting the child at home. This research project took focused on the lived experiences and voices of infant teacher’s, however, future research could benefit from examining the perceptions of the parents of young children during their transition from pre-school to primary school.

**Recommendations**

- In order to support the child’s ability to transition to primary school, children’s understanding, resilience and adaptability must be well-developed. Contributors favoured children staring school later, as they were more equipped to cope with new and different situations in their lives. Compulsory attendance of two years of pre-school under the ECCE Scheme will ensure the child has had ample opportunity to develop the necessary play, social, linguistic and problem-solving skills to navigate the transition to formal primary school.
- A standard communication platform needs to be established between the pre-school and primary school in determining the needs and reporting the strengths and achievements of the child. Such a communication tool should mirror that of the education passports sent from the child’s primary school to the new secondary school to support the student’s transition for the next phase of their education. Information to illustrate the pupil’s profile will be of great benefit and value to the Junior Infant teacher, as well as encouraging them to visit the children in their pre-school setting and meet and consult with their early years’ educators.

- Teachers acknowledged collectively the valuable contribution Aistear has made to the learning experiences of the child, and the development of the associated skills (play, social etc.) In particular, Aistear’s focus on creating opportunities to develop and expand language and vocabulary provides the necessary infrastructure to implement the new Primary Language Curriculum, not just in infant classes, but in all junior classes up to and including second class.

- With the need identified for better communication and the development of professional relationships between pre-school educators and infant primary school teachers, a formation of early year’s educators cluster groups would benefit all. Such a cluster could be a physical or virtual meeting where areas of best practice are shared, and such could inform the teaching and learning in both settings. The cluster could also draw upon support of outside agencies such as Tusla, the HSE, clinical supports and local childcare committees.
Conclusion

This research project explored the perceptions of infant primary school teachers on children’s needs and the influence of Aistear on children’s transitions from pre-school to primary school. The researcher sought to investigate infant teachers’ understandings of the concepts of transitions and the features of school readiness. Key skills and dispositions emerged as a major feature of school readiness, as well as the age of the child starting formal schooling. Age also emerged as a factor which inhibits children’s successful transitions. The researcher also considered if Aistear framework can support children’s transition into primary schooling. The framework proved to have a significant influence on children’s transitions, particularly in the development of skills and dispositions mentioned above through playful learning.
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Appendix 1: Consent Form

Consent Form

- I……………………………………… voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- 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 involve answering questions by the researcher on school readiness and transitions.

- 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 anonymous. 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 a master’s
dissertation.
• I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself 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
the care of the researcher until June 2021.
• I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has
been removed will be retained for two years.
• 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.

Contact information
Researcher: Sorcha Boyne
Email: sboynepme18@momail.mie.ie
Phone: 086xxxxxxx
Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher: Sorcha Boyne
I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study
Appendix 2: Information sheet

Dear teacher/principal,

Thank you for your consideration to take part in my dissertation. I am currently conducting this research as part of my final year Professional Masters of Education thesis in Marino Institute of Education. I wish to explore infant teacher’s perspectives on the transition from pre-school to primary school. The research will consist of one on one interviews with myself, comprised of short questions associated with the topic of transitions.

Just to inform you:

- You can withdraw from the project at any stage of the research. If this is the case, all data will then be destroyed.
- Each interview will be recorded with an audio device and then transcribed into a written document.
- I can assure you that your name, the name of your school or any identifiable information will not be shared. However, parts of the interview may be used in my thesis in written format, but will remain anonymous.
- Data from my dissertation will be stored for 12 months after the submission of my research project, however, after this period of time will be destroyed.

If you have any further questions or queries, please contact me by email or phone at sboynepme18@momail.mie.ie /08xxxxxxx
Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

To begin, I’m going to ask you some questions about your own teaching career and experience:

1. How many years teaching experience do you have?
2. Where did you study to become a teacher?
3. How long have you been teaching infants?

Now I am going to ask you some general questions on transitions and school readiness.

4. What does ‘school readiness’ mean to you?
5. What skills and dispositions do you think help children during their transition from pre-school to primary school?
6. Can you differentiate between a child who has attended preschool and one who has not? Why?
7. Are there any practices in place to help ease the child into their transition from preschool to junior infants in your school?
8. Can you think of any issues that can occur for infants coming from a less formal environment (the home, having not attended a pre-school setting) to a more formal setting (school)?
9. In your career to date, have you ever noticed children who have come to experience any difficulties with the transition from pre-school to primary? If so, could you expand on that?
10. What kind of approaches would you yourself have in place with children coming into junior infants?
11. Does your school make use of Transition Statements? If so, could you briefly tell me what information is provided in them?
12. Does your school use the Aistear framework? If so, for how long every day?

13. Do you think Aistear has had a positive influence and outcome in helping children transition from pre-school and primary?

14. Do you think Aistear has made a visible difference in your class?

15. In your opinion, do you think are any challenges infant teachers face today in regard to transitions?

Is there anything else you’d like to add?